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AUCASSIN
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NICOLETE

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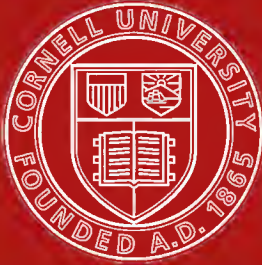
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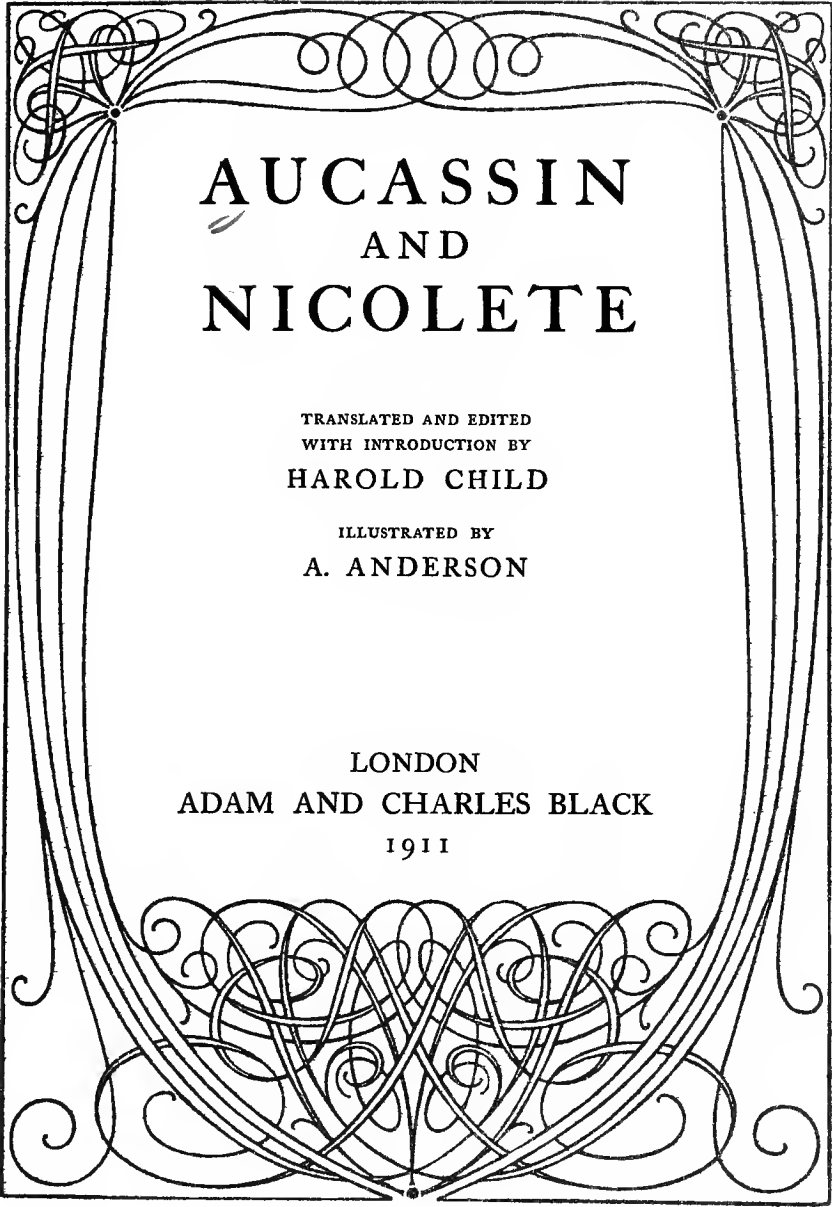
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AUCASSIN
AND
NICOLETE



‘To the chamber then went they,
There where Nicholete did stay.
When her true love she did see,
Never one so glad as she.’



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

TRANSLATED AND EDITED
WITH INTRODUCTION BY
HAROLD CHILD

ILLUSTRATED BY
A. ANDERSON

LONDON
ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK
1911

13933081

G-LWK

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AMERICA	THE MACMILLAN COMPANY 64 & 66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK
AUSTRALASIA	THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 205 FLINDERS LANE, MELBOURNE
CANADA	THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA, LTD. ST. MARTIN'S HOUSE, 70 BOND STREET, TORONTO
INDIA	MACMILLAN & COMPANY, LTD. MACMILLAN BUILDING, BOMBAY 309 BOW BAZAAR STREET, CALCUTTA
GERMANY, AUSTRIA- HUNGARY, RUSSIA, SCANDINAVIA, AND GERMAN SWITZERLAND	} BROCKHAUS AND PERSSE 16 QUERSTRASSE, LEIPZIG

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By A. ANDERSON

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INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

THE story of Aucassin and Nicolette was unknown to the general reader in England until Walter Pater first published his *Renaissance*. In that hotly discussed book an essay on "Two Early French Stories" deals with Ami and Amile, the friends, and with Aucassin and Nicolette, the lovers. Allured by Pater's criticism and his fragment of translation, many must have turned to the original ;



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but some years were to elapse before those ignorant, or afraid, of old French had the opportunity to read the whole story directly translated. In 1887 both Mr. Andrew Lang and Mr. F. W. Bourdillon published translations of the now well-known tale. Mr. Lang is the master of a fascinatingly wide and odd vocabulary. Mr. Bourdillon's translation is the work of a fine scholar in French and English; his Introduction remains the most acute and learned analysis of the tale yet written, and his notes are only less valuable than those of M. Suchier, the editor of the best French text.



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No subsequent translator can escape a heavy debt to these two books. The need for a third translation may, therefore, be questioned, and the author of that which follows can make only the excuse that the attempt to translate *Aucassin et Nicolette* is a pleasure in which every lover of letters and lover of lovers indulges himself at one time or another—especially if he happens to be staying in Provence.

In its present form, the tale of Aucassin and Nicolette is something over seven hundred years old. Scholars date it from the second half of the twelfth century—the



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period of the first two Angevin kings of England, Henry II. and Richard I., the period from the disastrous end of the Second Crusade to the scarcely more satisfactory end of the Third Crusade. In France during this period, the Crown was little by little beginning to gain supremacy over its own dominions, and establishing law in place of the caprice of many rulers; but the Provence with which this story deals (or professes to deal) was still under the rule of its own Counts. This period, moreover, was the hey-day of the Troubadours, those poets of the Langue d'Oc who have made



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the name of Provence stand high in the records of song and story, and the annals of courtly, medieval love. The following century saw the persecution of the Albigenses, with whom the Troubadours were closely linked, the degradation of the Provençal tongue to a *patois*, and the end of Provençal literature, until, in our own day, Mistral and others have woke it to new life.

In speaking of Provence, however, in connection with *Aucassin and Nicolette*, one must be careful. Beaucaire, it is true, is in Provence. It is well known to all travellers in that land of old romance—and of Tartarin



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of Tarascon ; for Beaucaire and Tarascon stand opposite each other on the banks of the Rhone, with a bridge to join them. Many, too, of those flying southward by some *train de luxe* must have gazed with interest at the rock, and the great ruined castle above it, which were the home of Aucassin. Valence, whence came his father's enemy, is only some seventy or eighty miles farther up the valley of the Rhone ; and a sixteenth-century writer assures us that Torelore, or Turelure, was in his days a nickname for Aigues-mortes. There is no question but that we are meant to imagine our-



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selves in Provence. And, for some of us, these two children have come to play so large a part in the spell cast by that magic land of sunshine, laughter, and beauty, that, no matter what scholarship may say, sentiment will always have Beaucaire to be indeed the home of Aucassin, and Provence the very land where he loved and lost, and found, and lost again, and finally won, his Nicolette.

The objection is that the story, as it survives in a unique manuscript—once the only barrier between this pure delight and oblivion—is written, not in the *Langue d'Oc*, but in a variety of the *Langue d'Oil*, the



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tongue of Northern France. This was the language of the great romances of chivalry, dealing with Charlemagne, Arthur, and other heroes. And *Aucassin and Nicolette* appears to belong to a great period in the history of those romances. It is, therefore, quite possible that, though the author chose to place his scene in Provence, he did not belong there, and even had never been there. If he had, it is argued, he would have known that there was no moat, wet or dry, at Beaucaire; and that it would have been almost, if not quite, as difficult to get shipwrecked at Beaucaire in the twelfth century



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as at Rye or Winchelsea to-day, or on the coast of Bohemia in the reign of King Polixenes. Again, there was no such title as Count of Beaucaire. Perhaps it is not safe to argue that the invention of such a person must spoil the illusion for those who knew him to be invented. Nowadays, our romancers give us Bishops and Dukes of existing places that can claim neither, and we do not mind ; but it seems unlikely that a Provençal telling a story to Provençals about a place in Provence would be so careless of his facts.

The story, then, was probably composed in Northern France, the



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country, not of the Troubadours, but of the Trouvères, — and this although its spirit has much more in common with the “gay science” of the South than with the more melancholy, prolonged, and profound literature of the North. What its age, and what its history, in the years before it came to be written down in that single manuscript, it is impossible to say for certain. Mr. Bourdillon and other scholars have adequately proved its origin to be Arabian. Aucassin, or Alcazin, was a Moorish name (that of Nicolette being possibly Greek). The form of the story follows, with



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a difference which we shall note in its place, that of the Arabian romances. That odd affair, too, of the King of Torelore is said to be a medieval legend of Eastern manners and customs. Starting from this point, and noticing the resemblance between Valence in France and Valentia in Spain, and between Tarascon in France and Terragon, or Terrasconne, in Spain ; noticing also that "Carthage" here means not the ancient Carthage but Cartagena, and that Nicolete was to be married to "one of the highest Kings of all Spain," Mr. Bourdillon suggests, with much probability on his side, that



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the story came to France by way of Spain, and that the names may have been changed so as to bring its events nearer home, for the benefit of the Northern French, without bringing them so close as to call for exactness of detail.

Be that as it may, how many miles, and on how many mouths must this story have travelled before it reached the honour of being written down! For this is one of the stories that lived, not in black-and-white, but on the lips and tongue. In castle and hall, by the inn fire, on the village green, beguiling a journey or speeding a dark winter



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evening, it must have been told time after time by those travelling libraries, theatres, concert-halls, and newspapers of the Middle Ages—the minstrels. It took its place, perhaps, among the interminable recital of poetic romance and the obscene humour of those hearty, dirty *fabliaux* with which the eighteenth century classed it. Then the day came, no doubt, when it passed on to the lips of a story-teller of genius—the man who gave it its present form. His version must have gained currency; and still it went on being told. Scholars can point to usages in the prose which are of later date than



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the verse. It was more difficult, of course, to learn the prose exactly than to learn the verse, and easier and more natural to change what was old-fashioned in it. Then—finally, so far as the modern reader is concerned—some one took the trouble to have this story written down, so that he (or she) might read it or have it read whenever they wanted. The writing, it appears, was done in rather a hurry. And that writing—the only one known—has survived to this day, and may be seen in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

Walter Pater, following a French



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critic, thought that "the piece was probably intended to be recited by a company of trained performers, many of whom, at least for the lesser parts, were probably children." To differ from Pater on such a point is rash; but the present writer can find no trace in the story, as it has come down to us, of a dramatic performance. It is true that each section is headed: *Or diènt et content et fablent*—"Here they say; here they tell in prose"; and each verse section, *Or se cante*—"Here is sung"; and these directions certainly seem a little unnecessary. But the narrative in the third person plays so important



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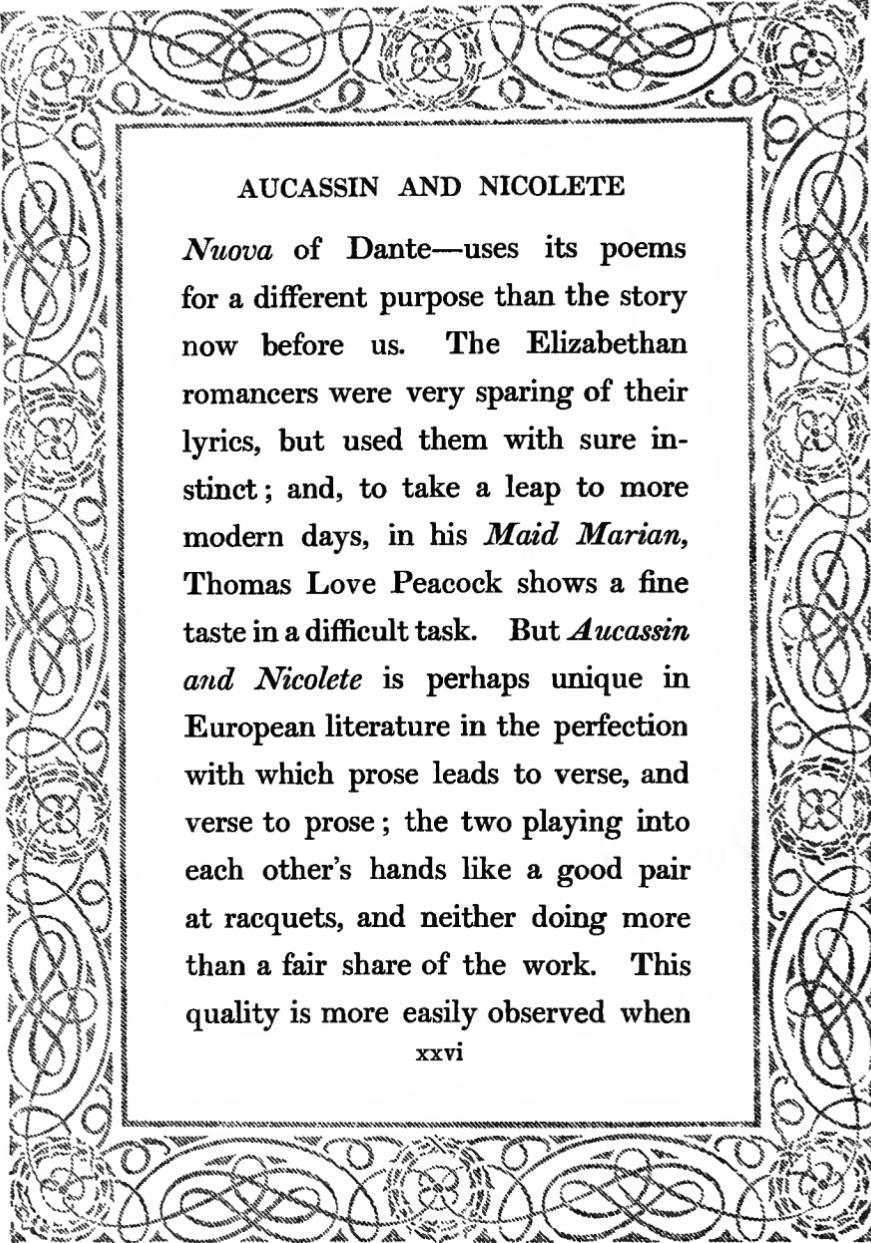
a part in proportion to the dialogue, and the “said he” and “said she” occur so frequently, that the telling of the story seems to belong entirely to one minstrel, ready, perhaps, with his instrument to touch the chords of the simple chant to which the verse sections are set.

In form the tale is what is known as a *cantefable*—“a sing-and-say,” a form founded, as was said above, on the Arabian romances. The difference there alluded to is this: that in the Eastern romances the verse is only used to intensify and prolong the emotional moments, like the music in an opera, or to point the



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moral, as the choruses of a Greek play are not unknown to do ; while in *Aucassin and Nicolette* the verses carry on the action. The skill with which they are made to do this is one of the most remarkable features of this work of genius. As a rule, a mixture of verse and prose must fail, unless the author can make it appear that he could not help “ dropping,” as the phrase goes, “ into poetry.” The poetry must seem to come inevitably, when the emotion is so heightened that prose cannot express it. A certain work of loftiest beauty written about a century later than our *cantefable* — the *Vita*



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Nuova of Dante—uses its poems for a different purpose than the story now before us. The Elizabethan romancers were very sparing of their lyrics, but used them with sure instinct; and, to take a leap to more modern days, in his *Maid Marian*, Thomas Love Peacock shows a fine taste in a difficult task. But *Aucassin and Nicolette* is perhaps unique in European literature in the perfection with which prose leads to verse, and verse to prose; the two playing into each other's hands like a good pair at racquets, and neither doing more than a fair share of the work. This quality is more easily observed when

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the verses are sung, or hummed, or imagined, to the little tune, which, written in modern notation for this book by Mr. H. C. Colles, runs as follows :



The first two lines were sung one after the other, like the two parts of a double chant, the second being repeated, probably, at some convenient place in each poem which contains

* Minims and crotchets are only used as suggesting the *approximate* lengths of the notes.



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an uneven number of verses. The third line was reserved for the shorter verse that concludes each poem.

The verse in the original is not rhymed. The French language offers great facilities for assonance, and assonance is what the author employed. That is, while there is no definite scheme of rhymes, all the lines in each section end with the same, or nearly the same, vowel-sound. In the first section, for instance, all the lines end with the sound of the French *i*; in the fifteenth all end with the sound of the French *an*; in the twenty-seventh all end with the *o* sound. Within these



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limits considerable liberty is taken. In the twenty-seventh section, for instance, we find *ons*, *ous*, and *ors* ; in the twenty-ninth section, which is one of the *i* sections, we find *i*, *in*, and *ir* ; and so with others. The English language gives fewer chances for assonance in poems that may contain as many as forty lines. Yet to invent a scheme of rhymes is to go some way towards stiffening the free-running motion of the French, in which one hears so clearly the singing voice of the narrator. The present translation, therefore, aims at a compromise that shall be at least nearer to assonance than to rhyme ;



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and by keeping as nearly as his wits and the English language would allow him to vowel-sounds not too unlike each other, the translator has tried to give something of the nature as well as the exact meaning of the original poems.

That the author of this *cantefable*, as we know it, was a man of genius, a study of the story in the original will prove to all. His name and history remain entirely unknown. And there the matter might be left, but for an intricate little riddle of scholarship and a very large accumulation of conjecture that has become piled upon one of three possible



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answers. At the very outset of the story we find these four lines :

Qui vauroit bons vers oïr
del deport du viel caitif
de deus biaux enfans petis,
Nicholete et Aucassins.

There is no question of the reading : the manuscript is unmistakable. And the literal translation of the text, as it stands, is : “ Who would wish good verses to hear of the delight of the old wretch of two fair children small, Nicholete and Aucassins.” The reader will immediately ask himself : “ What ‘ old wretch ’ ? ” but he may read the story to an end without finding out. This is the first and the last we hear of him. It seems,



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undoubtedly, a little odd that he should be thrust upon our notice at the very beginning and never mentioned again. One theory is that the "old wretch" is a term of endearment for Aucassin; and that theory, while it follows the straightforward meaning of the words, is one that needs only to be mentioned to be discarded. Another theory is that the words refer to the minstrel telling the tale—to the author of genius, that is, to whom we owe the story in its present form. That involves some clumsiness in the renderings of the *del*, *du*, and *de*; but it has the advantage of letting conjecture loose



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upon a very interesting figure. This “old wretch” — this noble-looking, world-wise old rover, with the heart of a child, the kindly wisdom of age and the voice of honey—how like him, with all the proud self-abasement of his outlawed, Church-hated class, to call himself an “old wretch” ! Or, better still — this scarred and battered old soldier, long a captive (for *caitif* means that too) in the dungeon of the Saracen, supporting his old age by telling this dewy-sweet tale up and down the land, whence he went crusading, and to which he had at last returned, through Heaven knows what escapes and adventures !



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Conjecture has gone farther yet. What of the pilgrim, in section 11, who was cured of his sickness by the sight of Nicolete's bare legs? May not that incident have been founded on some event in the past of this fine old fellow? It is true that he calls the pilgrim a Limousin; but that may be "only his fun." And, if not, we have only to suppose that he learned the Northern tongue in which he writes in order that he might write in it. So, little by little, the author grows to be a figure almost as important in the general idea of the story as Aucassin and Nicolete themselves. But there is



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no reason why conjecture should timidly stop there. To those recorded above let us add a new one. May not the "old wretch" have been also at one time the King of Torelore, who lay in bed while his wife went to the wars? Is it not most probable that the word *caitif* refers to a captivity of that very strange and delicate kind? In that case, what more easy to suppose than that the reformed Monarch resigned his throne, and took to the minstrel calling in order to sing the praises of Aucassin as a kind of penance?

Unfortunately, for all this conjecture and much more that has



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been, and perhaps will be spun, the story gives no excuse—if we except an elderly, wise tenderness, the smile of a kind old uncle, which is found in it here and there. Yet M. Suchier was undoubtedly a very bold man when he resolved to throw this interesting figure overboard altogether. In a later edition he repented, and pulled him out. Finally, he hardened his heart, and let him drown. There is no question, as was said above, of the reading “*du viel caitif*.” M. Suchier boldly changed *viel* into *duel*—grief. So we get, in a literal translation: “Who would list good verses to hear of the delight,



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of the wretched grief of two fair children small." With the sense of that there is no quarrelling ; the delight and the grief of Aucassin and Nicolette are the very subject of the story. The greatest objection is that there is as little authority for *duel* as for the life-story of the "old wretch." Minor objections are that *du duel* (even when we make, as the scansion demands, a monosyllable of *duel*) is a jangle that this particular author would not have allowed himself, especially at the very beginning of his tale ; and that there is, apparently, no authority for the use of *caitif* as an adjective with an abstract noun.



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No good English scholars have supported M. Suchier's reading. Mr. Bourdillon, Mr. Lang, Mr. E. K. Chambers, are all against him. When, therefore, a translator decides to follow M. Suchier, it is useless for him to pretend that he has any excuse, except that he likes it that way best. It is a fad—like the reproduction in the ensuing text, of the manuscript's very various spelling of the proper names. But it is just possible that there may be others who are rather tired of the "old wretch," and will be secretly glad to escape him for once.

Old or young, wretch or captive,



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he was an artist in story-telling, and a wise and tender man. To read his tale is to find never a word too much, and every word the right, the living word. He takes the stock phrases of his craft, and gives them new life and meaning. When he describes what is important to his story, he describes it so that it is as clear and vivid as an illumination, and no less dainty. When he is dealing with what matters less, such as Nicolete's captivity among her kinsfolk at Carthage, he tells you just enough for his purpose and no more. He is all for the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. He feels beauty so intensely



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that we, seven centuries and more after him, thrill to the beauty that he loved ; yet he has all the reticence of true reverence for a thing divine. In a single famous passage he becomes, as Pater called it, strident ; but we must remember all that he and his craft had to suffer from a Church yet blind to beauties and innocent joys which were then dawning on those "Dark Ages" ; and must remember, too, that he had the art to choose for his mouthpiece an Aucassin who was but a boy—and a boy in love.

Yet not a mere moping, love-sick boy—not one of those sickly creatures



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to whom love means a deadening, not a quickening, of the powers. True, in the earlier scenes, Aucassin is as wilful—as “naughty” one might almost say—as could be; but see, later, how sweetly he takes advice and correction (in any matter where his love is not concerned), and how, once rouse him, he is a brave soldier, a youth of hearty sound sense, and, when his time comes, a good ruler. The inclusion of that puzzling episode at Torelore would be more than justified, if it did nothing else than show us how far from “morbid” or “effeminate” was this great lover.

And Nicolette was worthy of his



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love. To the mind of a middle-aged man, nothing more clearly declares the author, too, to be middle-aged, than the character of Nicolette. She is not made of sugar and spice and all that's nice, as love-sick boys like to imagine their mistresses. For all her beauty and her slenderness she is a very capable young woman, with a will of her own and plenty of enterprise and courage. Certainly, she is none the less adorable for being, as Pater discerned, a "beautiful, weird, foreign girl," with strange powers and a strange intensity. We are glad with a personal joy to leave these great friends and lovers to-



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gether in their castle on the rock at Beaucaire. Is it not better that a romance of love should end "happily," with the lovers at last united in the full flood of life, than be broken off short by jealousy or custom or some other black old agent of death? That is one among many reasons why *Aucassin and Nicolette* seems the best love-story in the world.

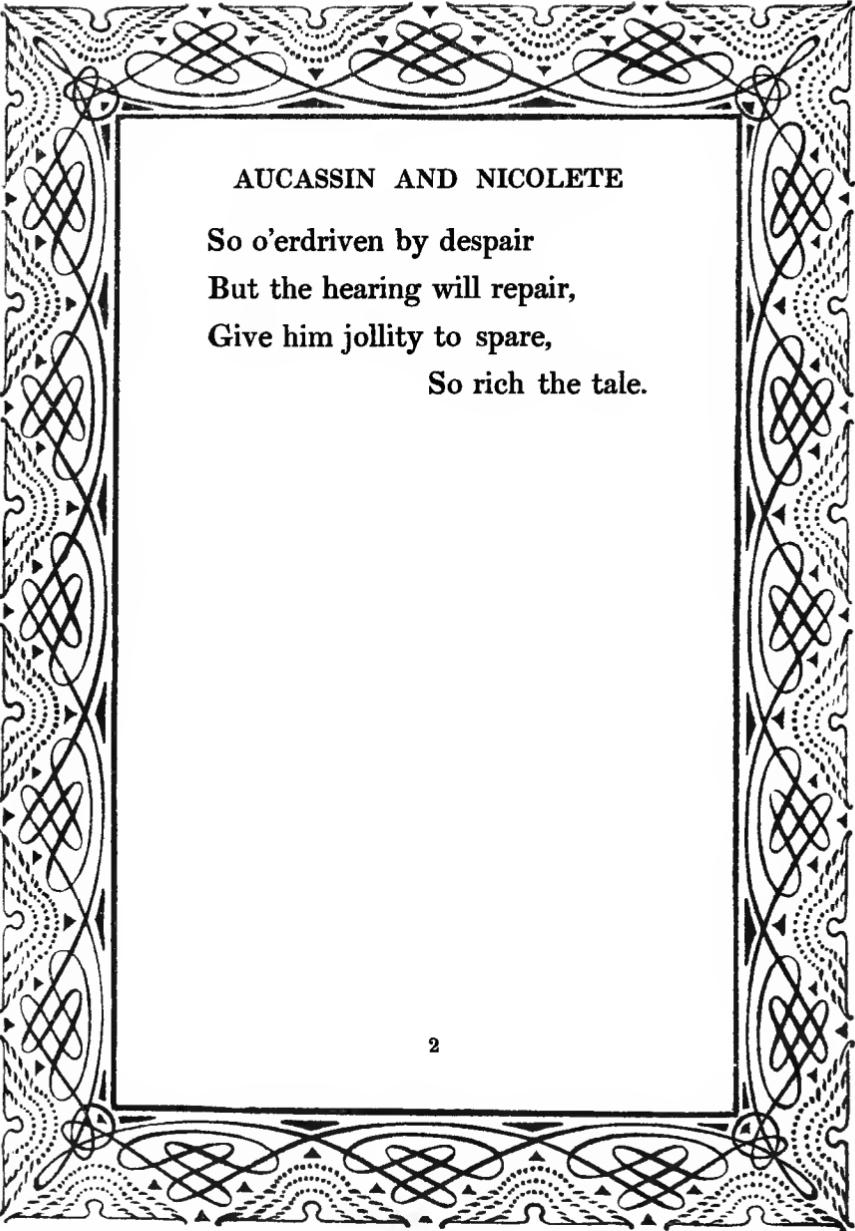
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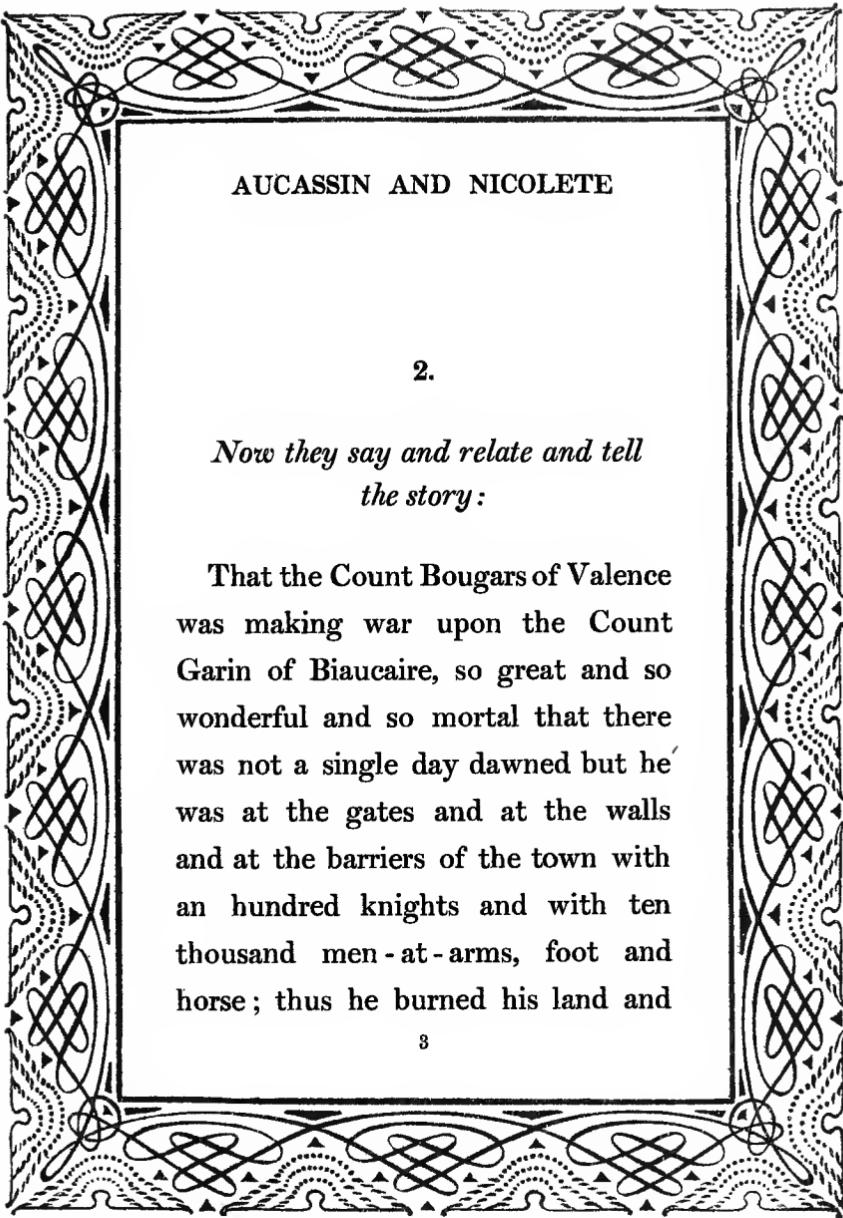
It is of Aucasin and of Nicolete :

Who would list in right good verse
Tale of grief full sad to hear,
Of two children young and fair,
Nicholete and Aucassins ;
Of the woes he had to bear
And the doughty deeds to dare
For his love with face so clear ?
Sweet the song, the fable rare,
Courtly and well served the fare ;
No man is so full of care,
None so wretched, none so bare,



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So o'erdriven by despair
But the hearing will repair,
Give him jollity to spare,
So rich the tale.

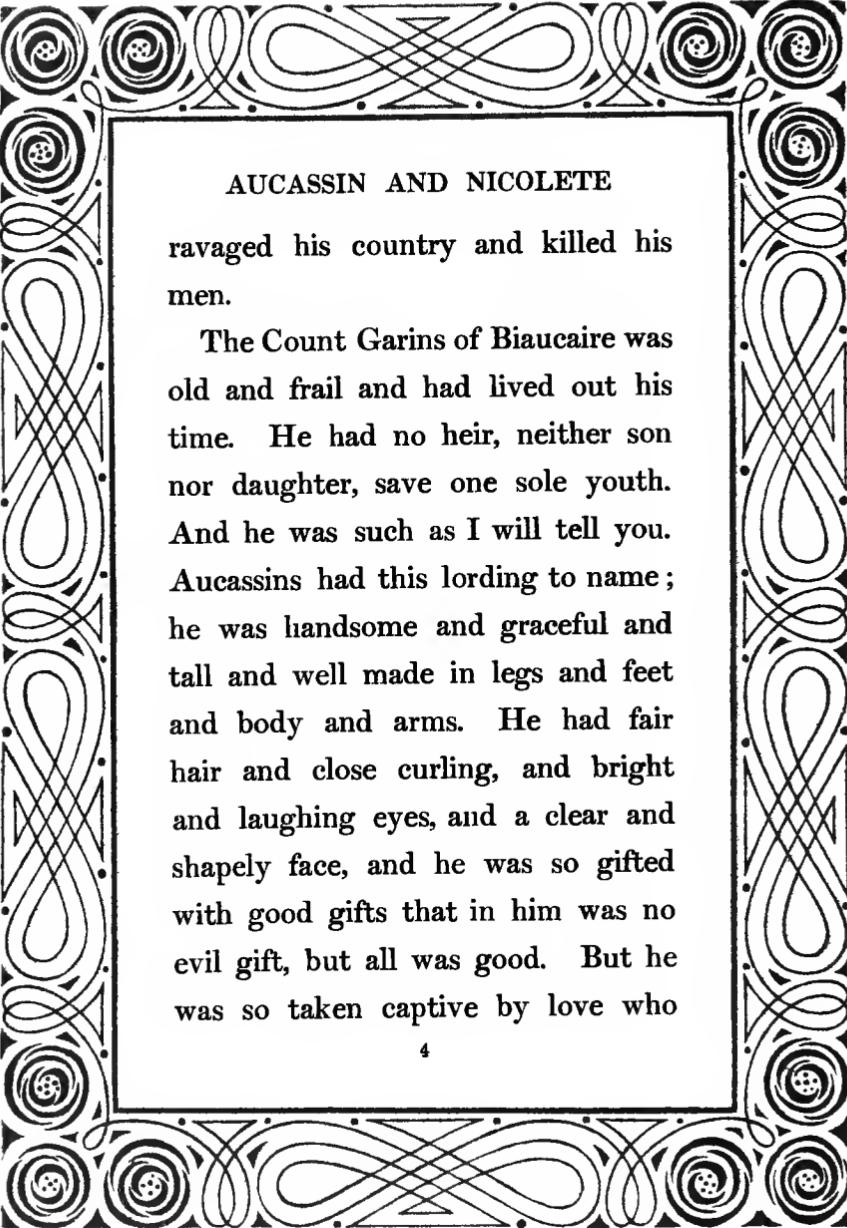


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2.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story :*

That the Count Bougars of Valence
was making war upon the Count
Garin of Biaucaire, so great and so
wonderful and so mortal that there
was not a single day dawned but he
was at the gates and at the walls
and at the barriers of the town with
an hundred knights and with ten
thousand men-at-arms, foot and
horse ; thus he burned his land and



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ravaged his country and killed his men.

The Count Garins of Biaucaire was old and frail and had lived out his time. He had no heir, neither son nor daughter, save one sole youth. And he was such as I will tell you. Aucassins had this lording to name; he was handsome and graceful and tall and well made in legs and feet and body and arms. He had fair hair and close curling, and bright and laughing eyes, and a clear and shapely face, and he was so gifted with good gifts that in him was no evil gift, but all was good. But he was so taken captive by love who

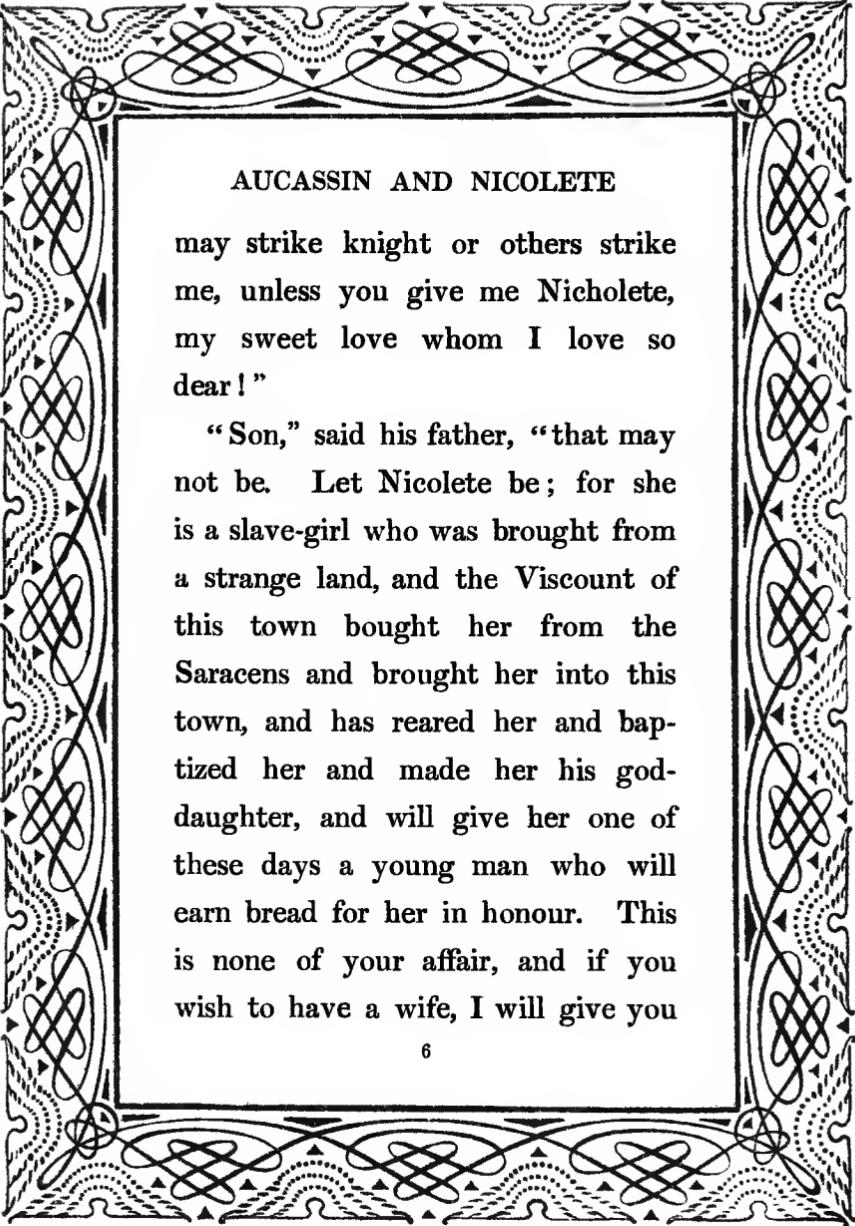


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conquers all that he had no will to be a knight nor to take arms nor to go to the tourney nor to do anything of what he should. His father and his mother would say to him :

“Son, take now your arms and mount horse and defend your country and aid your men. If they see you among them, the better will they defend their bodies and their goods and your land and mine.”

“Father,” said Aucassins, “what do you speak of now ? Never God give me anything that I ask of Him, if I become knight or mount horse or go to combat or battle where I



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may strike knight or others strike me, unless you give me Nicholete, my sweet love whom I love so dear!"

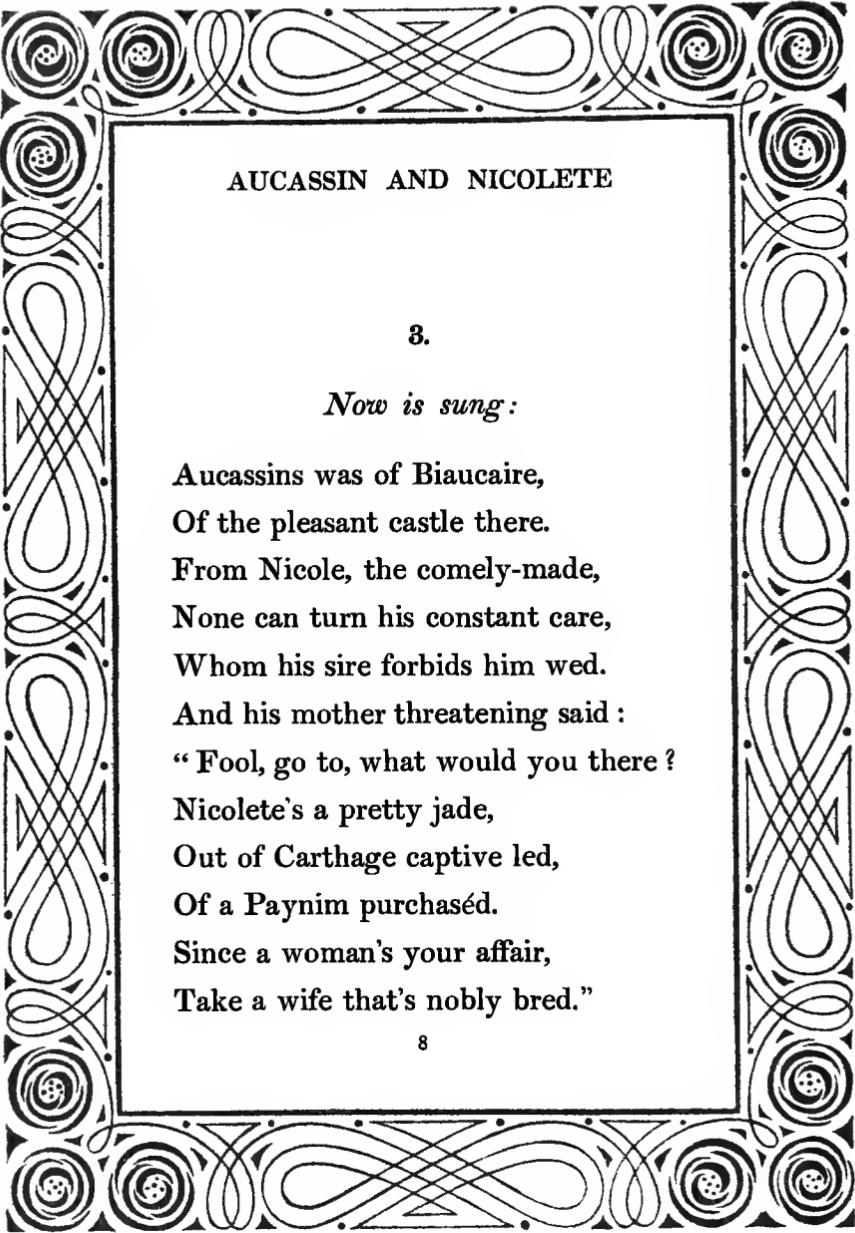
"Son," said his father, "that may not be. Let Nicolete be; for she is a slave-girl who was brought from a strange land, and the Viscount of this town bought her from the Saracens and brought her into this town, and has reared her and baptized her and made her his god-daughter, and will give her one of these days a young man who will earn bread for her in honour. This is none of your affair, and if you wish to have a wife, I will give you



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the daughter of a King or of a Count. There is no man in France so rich but if you wish to have his daughter you shall have her."

"Ah! father," said Aucassins, "can you tell me of any honour so high in all the world that if Nicolette, my most sweet love, had it, it would not well become her? If she were Empress of Constantinople or of Germany or Queen of France or of England, it would be little enough for her, she is so noble and gracious and gifted with all good gifts."

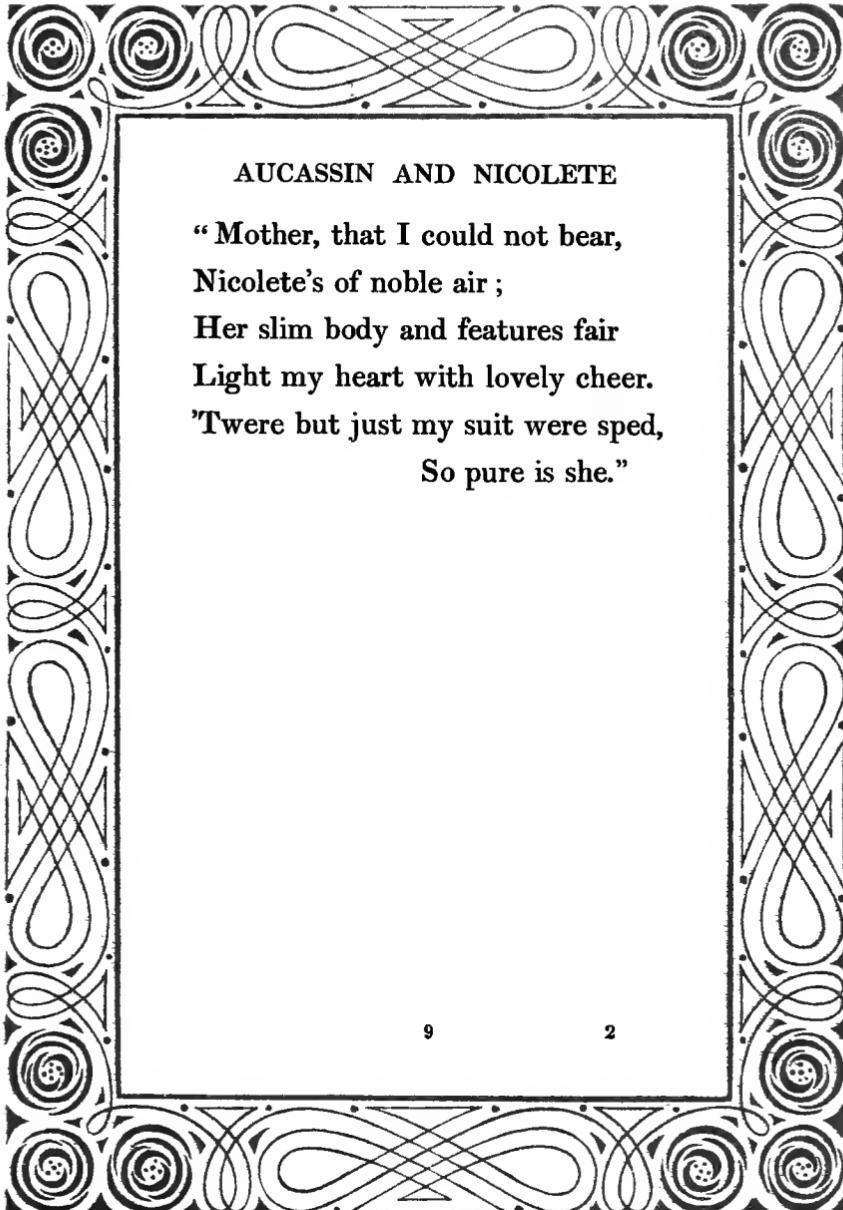


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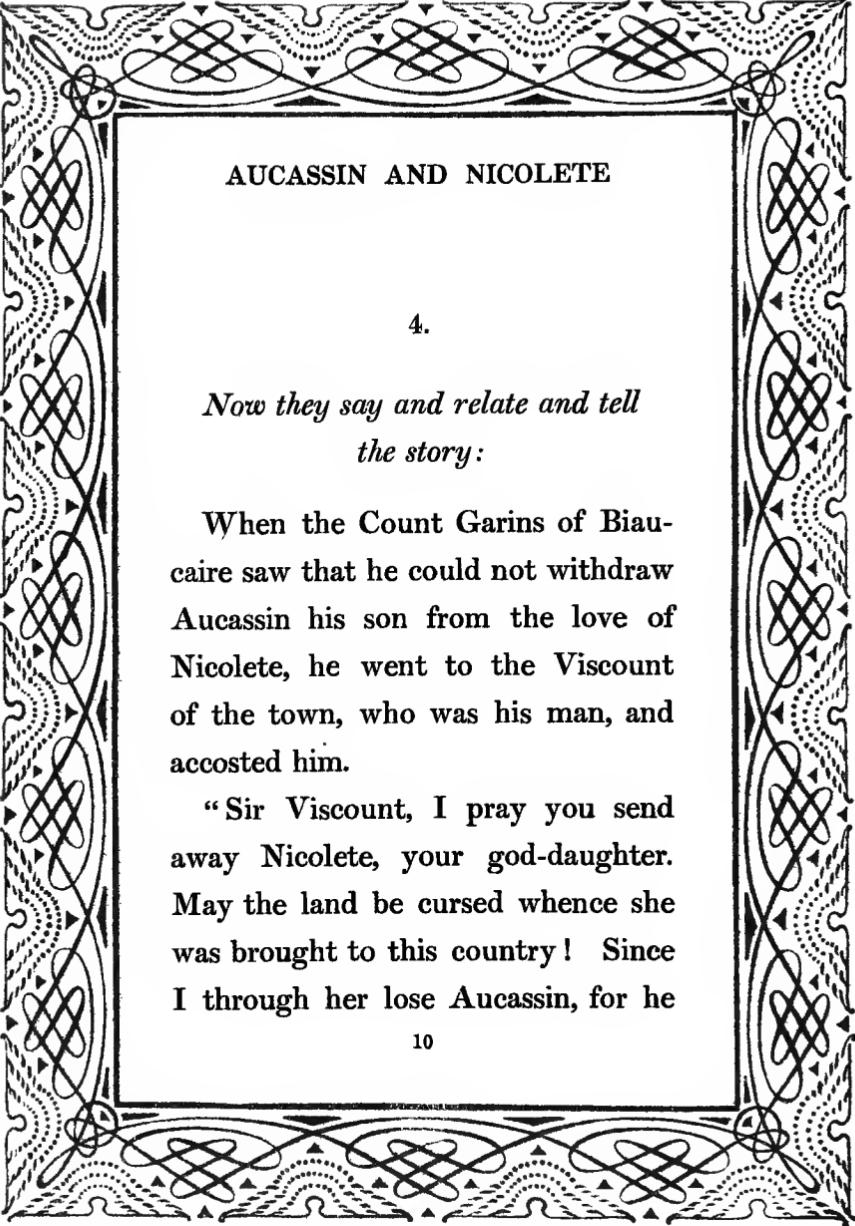
Now is sung :

Aucassins was of Biaucaire,
Of the pleasant castle there.
From Nicole, the comely-made,
None can turn his constant care,
Whom his sire forbids him wed.
And his mother threatening said :
“ Fool, go to, what would you there ?
Nicolete's a pretty jade,
Out of Carthage captive led,
Of a Paynim purchaséd.
Since a woman's your affair,
Take a wife that's nobly bred.”



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“Mother, that I could not bear,
Nicolette’s of noble air ;
Her slim body and features fair
Light my heart with lovely cheer.
’Twere but just my suit were sped,
So pure is she.”



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4.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story:*

When the Count Garins of Biaucaire saw that he could not withdraw Aucassin his son from the love of Nicolete, he went to the Viscount of the town, who was his man, and accosted him.

“Sir Viscount, I pray you send away Nicolete, your god-daughter. May the land be cursed whence she was brought to this country! Since I through her lose Aucassin, for he



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has no will to be a knight nor to do anything of what he should. And know you well that, if I can have hold of her, I will burn her in a fire, and you yourself may be full afraid for yourself."

"Sir," said the Viscount, "it lies heavy upon me that he comes and that he goes and that he speaks with her. I had bought her with my money, and I had reared her and baptized her and made her my god-daughter, and I would have given her one of these days a young man who would earn bread for her in honour. This was none of Aucassins's your son's affair. But since it is

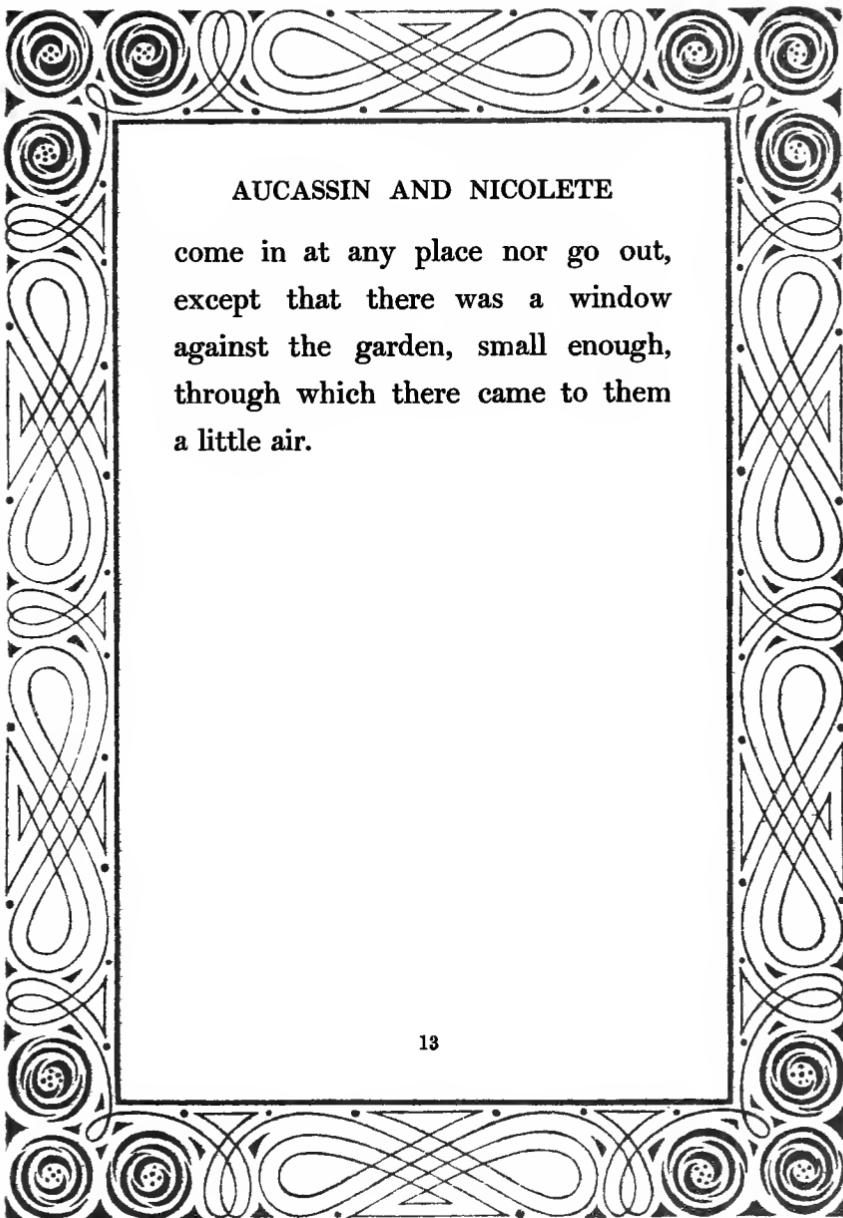


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your will and your pleasure I will send her into such a land and such a country that never will he see her with his eyes."

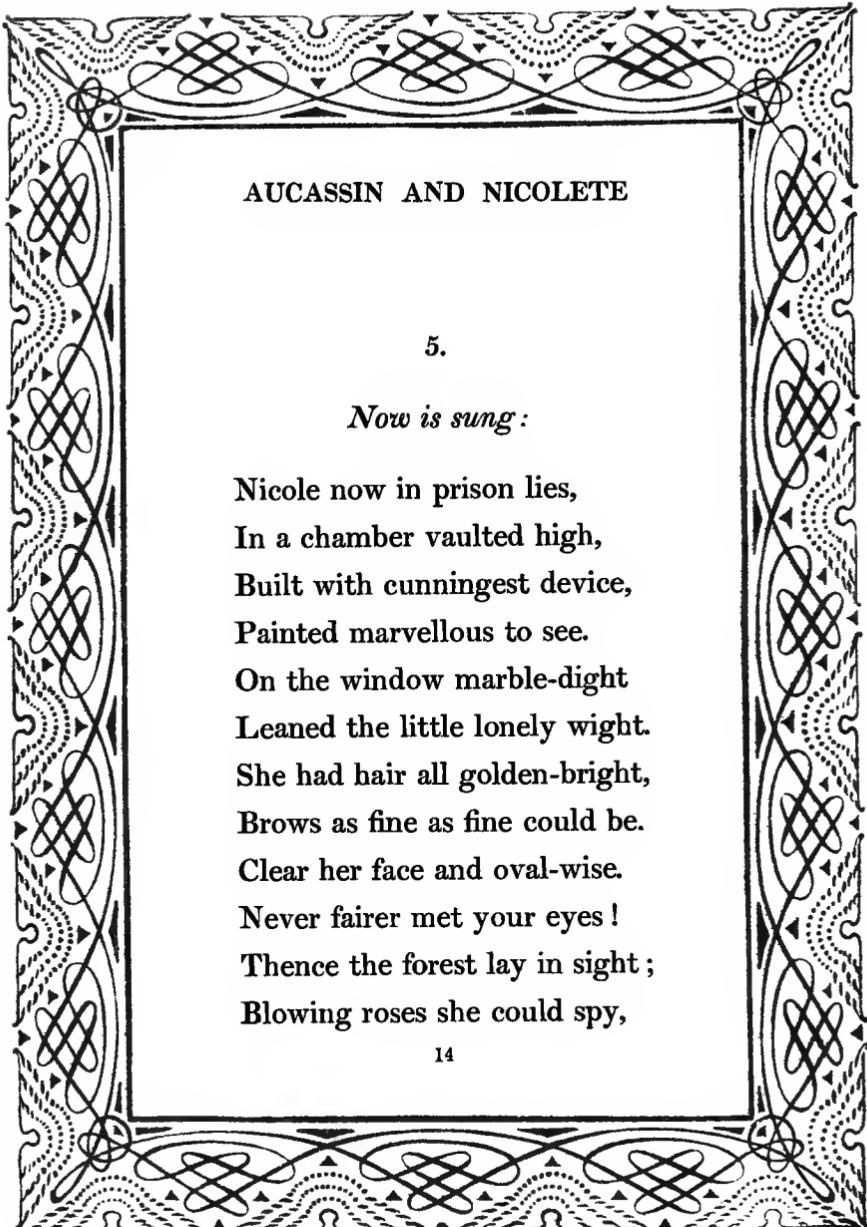
"Keep you to this!" said the Count Garins to him. "Great evils may come to you of it."

They parted. And the Viscount was a very rich man and had a rich palace beside a garden. In a chamber there he had Nicolette placed on an upper floor, and an old woman with her for company, and to dwell with her, and he had bread and meat and wine sent to them, and whatever they had need of. Then he had the door sealed up, so that no one could



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come in at any place nor go out,
except that there was a window
against the garden, small enough,
through which there came to them
a little air.

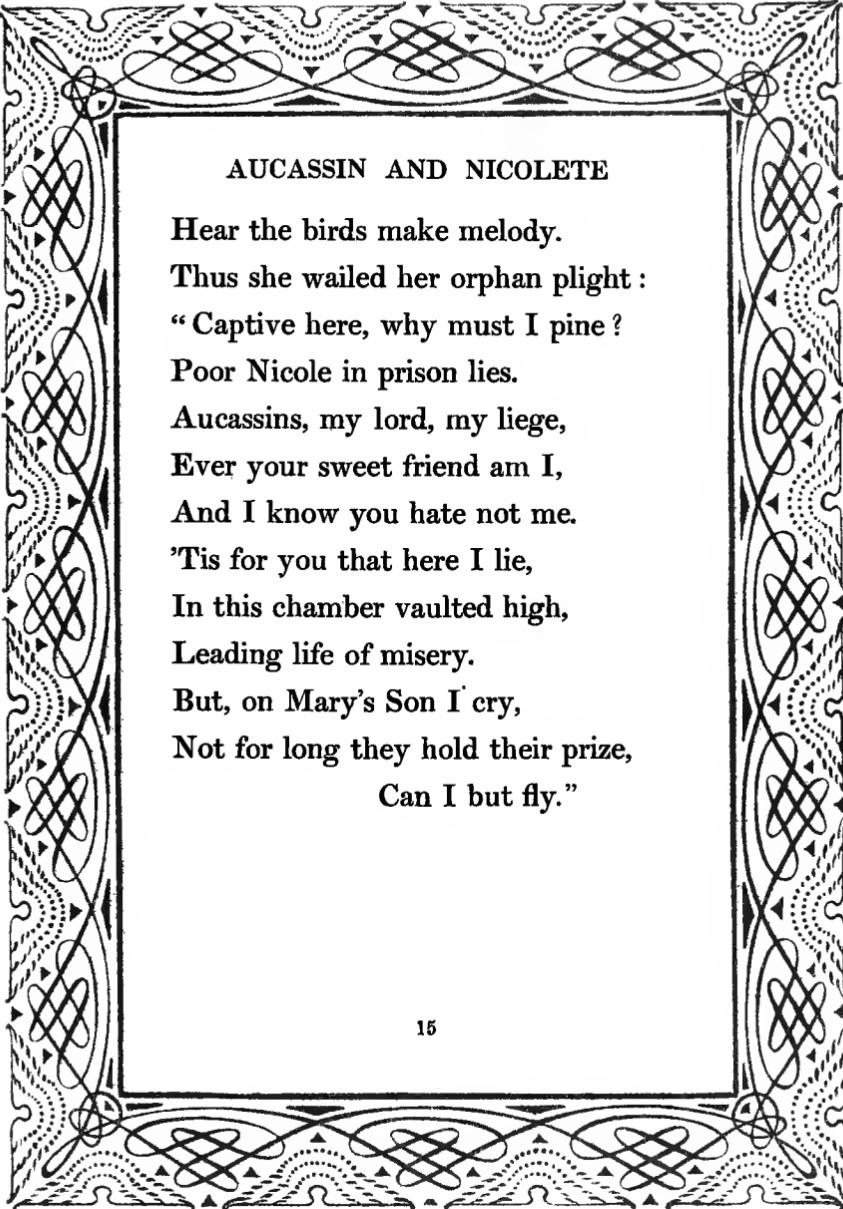


AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

5.

Now is sung :

Nicole now in prison lies,
In a chamber vaulted high,
Built with cunningest device,
Painted marvellous to see.
On the window marble-dight
Leaned the little lonely wight.
She had hair all golden-bright,
Brows as fine as fine could be.
Clear her face and oval-wise.
Never fairer met your eyes !
Thence the forest lay in sight ;
Blowing roses she could spy,



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Hear the birds make melody.
Thus she wailed her orphan plight :
“Captive here, why must I pine ?
Poor Nicole in prison lies.
Aucassins, my lord, my liege,
Ever your sweet friend am I,
And I know you hate not me.
'Tis for you that here I lie,
In this chamber vaulted high,
Leading life of misery.
But, on Mary's Son I cry,
Not for long they hold their prize,
Can I but fly.”



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6.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story:*

Nicolete was in prison, as you have heard and been told, in the chamber. It was cried and noised abroad over all the land and over all the country that Nicolete was lost. Some said that she had fled out of the land, and others said that the Count Garins of Biaucaire had had her murdered. Whoever rejoiced at it, Aucassins indeed was not glad, so he went to the Viscount of the town and accosted him.

‘On the window marble-dight
Leaned the little lonely wight.
She had hair all golden-bright,
Brows as fine as fine could be.
Clear her face and oval-wise.
Never fairer met your eyes !’

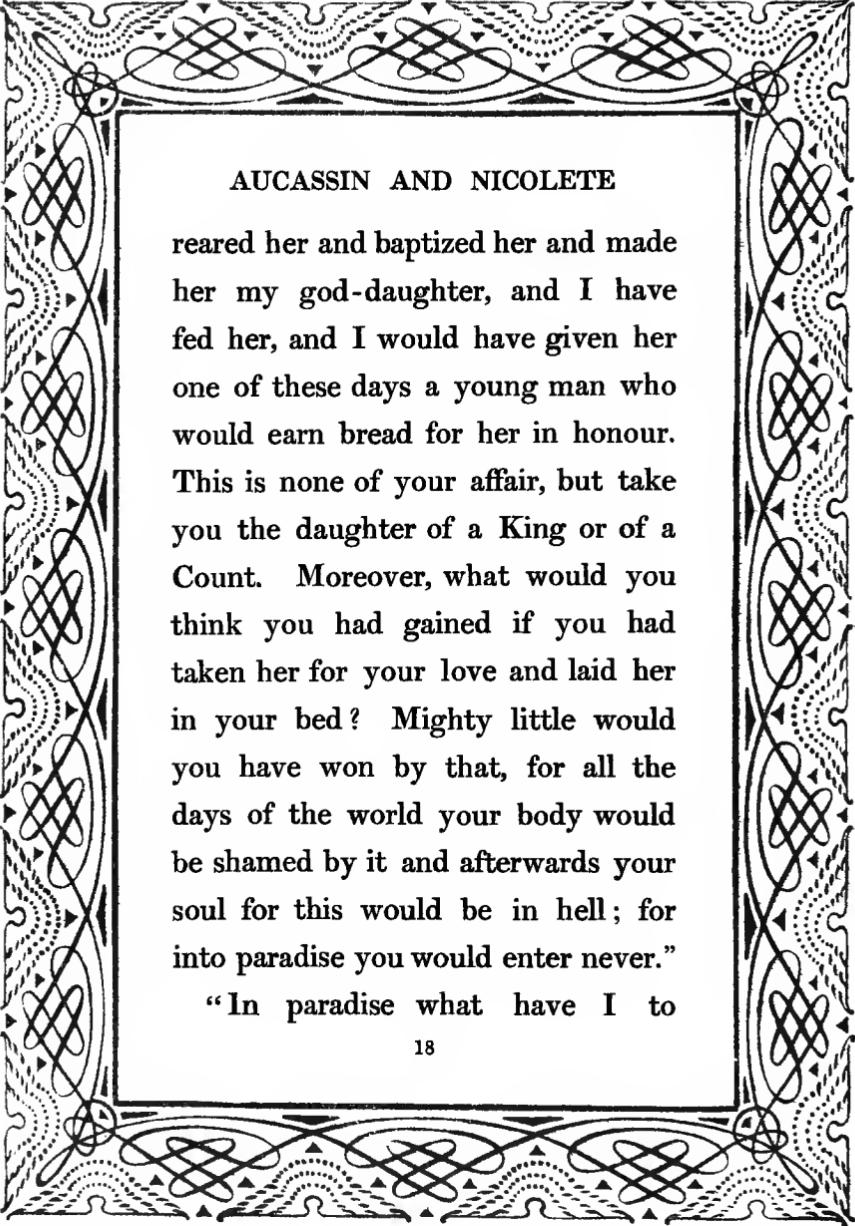




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“Sir Viscount, what have you done with Nicolete, my most sweet love, the thing in all the world that I loved best? Have you carried her off from me or stolen her away? Know well that, if I die of it, vengeance will be required of you, and that will be very right. For you will have killed me with your two hands, since you have stolen away from me the thing in this world that I loved best.”

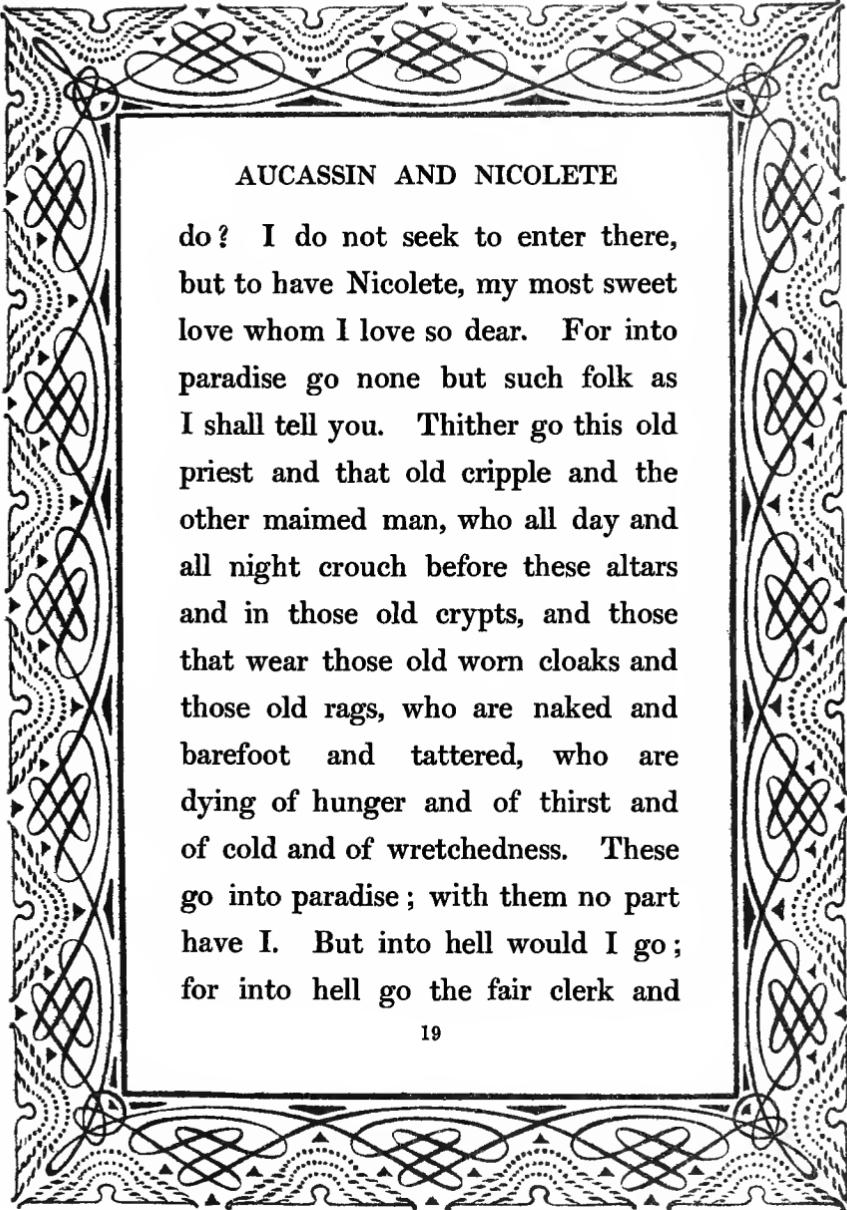
“Fair sir,” said the Viscount, “I pray you let this be. Nicolete is a captive that I brought from a strange land, and I bought her with my goods from the Saracens, and I have



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reared her and baptized her and made her my god-daughter, and I have fed her, and I would have given her one of these days a young man who would earn bread for her in honour. This is none of your affair, but take you the daughter of a King or of a Count. Moreover, what would you think you had gained if you had taken her for your love and laid her in your bed? Mighty little would you have won by that, for all the days of the world your body would be shamed by it and afterwards your soul for this would be in hell; for into paradise you would enter never."

"In paradise what have I to



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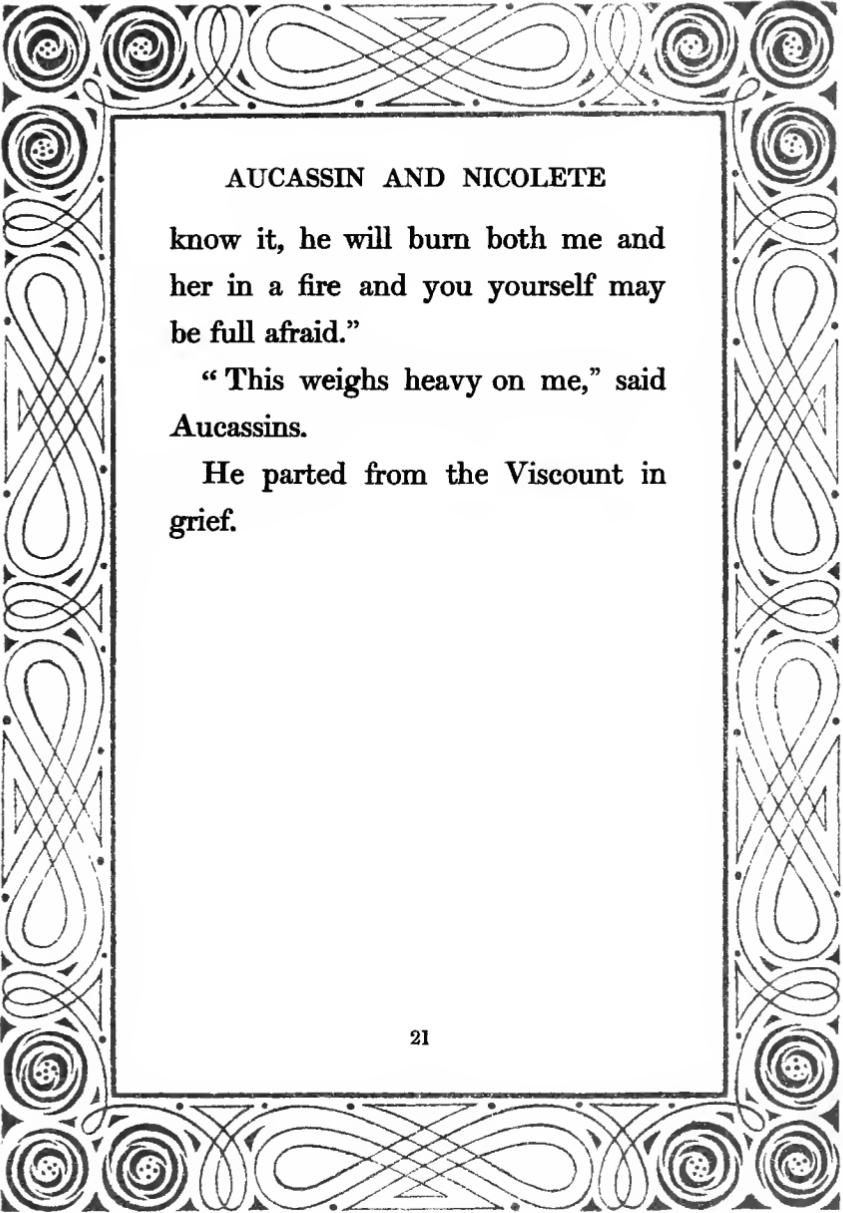
do? I do not seek to enter there, but to have Nicolete, my most sweet love whom I love so dear. For into paradise go none but such folk as I shall tell you. Thither go this old priest and that old cripple and the other maimed man, who all day and all night crouch before these altars and in those old crypts, and those that wear those old worn cloaks and those old rags, who are naked and barefoot and tattered, who are dying of hunger and of thirst and of cold and of wretchedness. These go into paradise; with them no part have I. But into hell would I go; for into hell go the fair clerk and



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the fair knight who have died in the tourneys and in the rich wars, and the stout man-at-arms and the noble man. With these would I go. And there go the fair courtly ladies, such as have two lovers or three besides their lords ; and there go the gold and the silver and the furs white and grey ; and there go the harper and minstrel and the king of the world. With these would I go, so I may have Nicolete, my most sweet love, with me."

"Truly," said the Viscount, "you will be talking of it for nothing ; for never more will you see her. And if you speak to her and your father

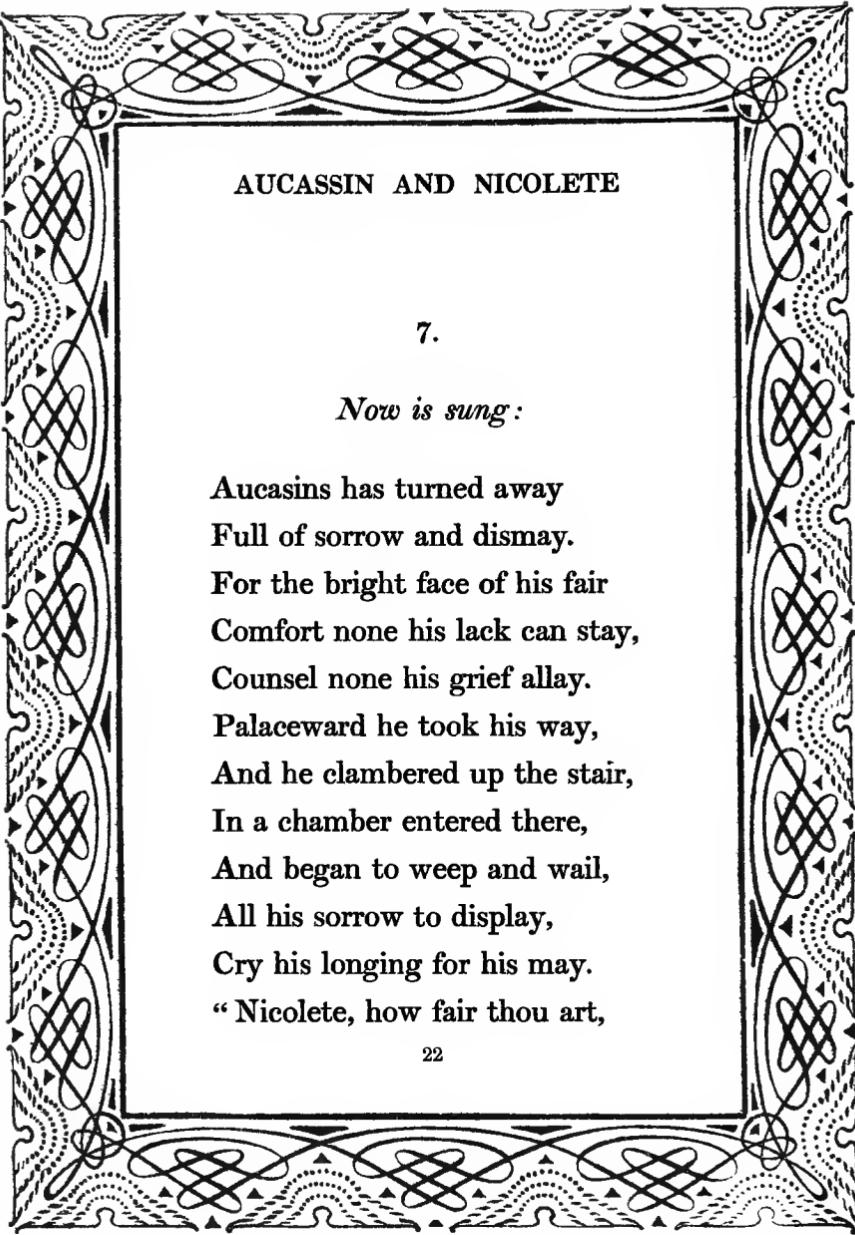


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know it, he will burn both me and her in a fire and you yourself may be full afraid."

"This weighs heavy on me," said Aucassins.

He parted from the Viscount in grief.

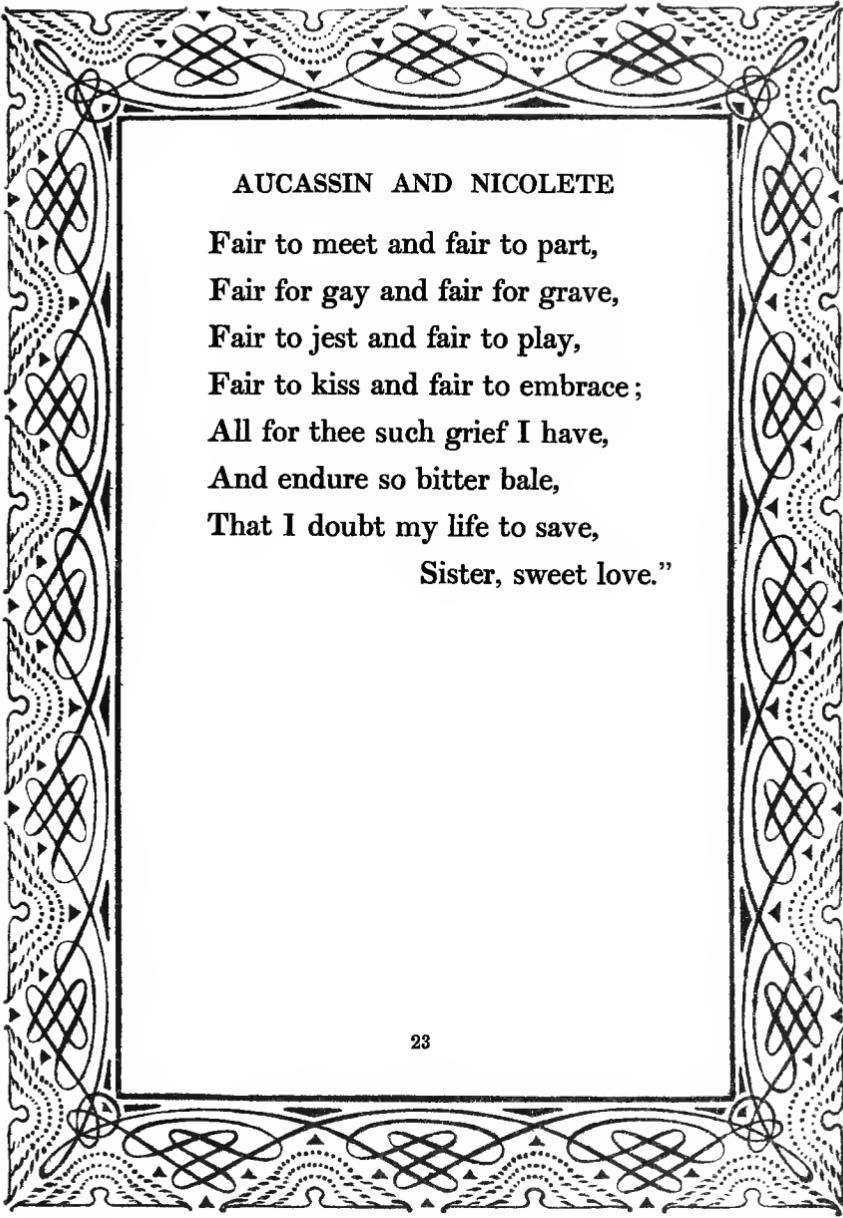


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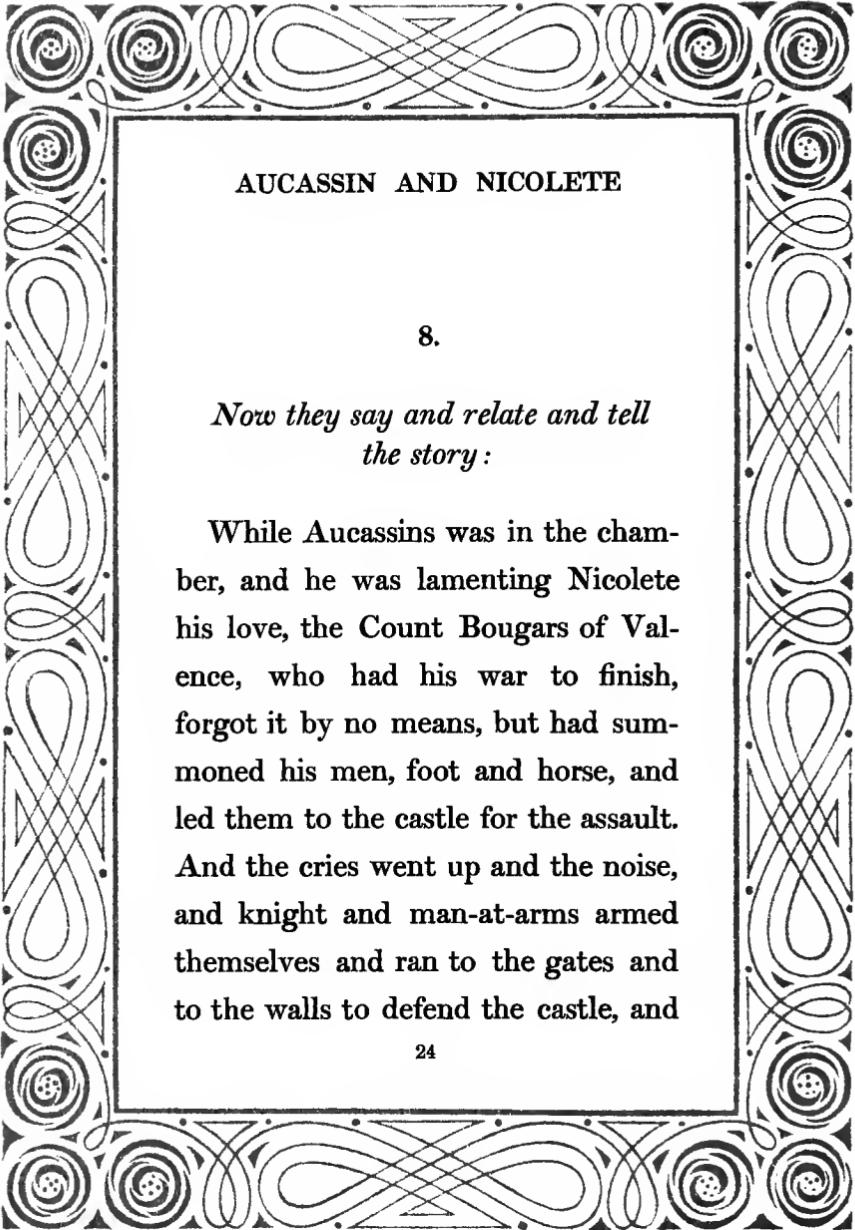
Now is sung :

Aucasins has turned away
Full of sorrow and dismay.
For the bright face of his fair
Comfort none his lack can stay,
Counsel none his grief allay.
Palaceward he took his way,
And he clambered up the stair,
In a chamber entered there,
And began to weep and wail,
All his sorrow to display,
Cry his longing for his may.
“ Nicolete, how fair thou art,



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Fair to meet and fair to part,
Fair for gay and fair for grave,
Fair to jest and fair to play,
Fair to kiss and fair to embrace;
All for thee such grief I have,
And endure so bitter bale,
That I doubt my life to save,
Sister, sweet love."



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8.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story :*

While Aucassins was in the chamber, and he was lamenting Nicolete his love, the Count Bougars of Valence, who had his war to finish, forgot it by no means, but had summoned his men, foot and horse, and led them to the castle for the assault. And the cries went up and the noise, and knight and man-at-arms armed themselves and ran to the gates and to the walls to defend the castle, and

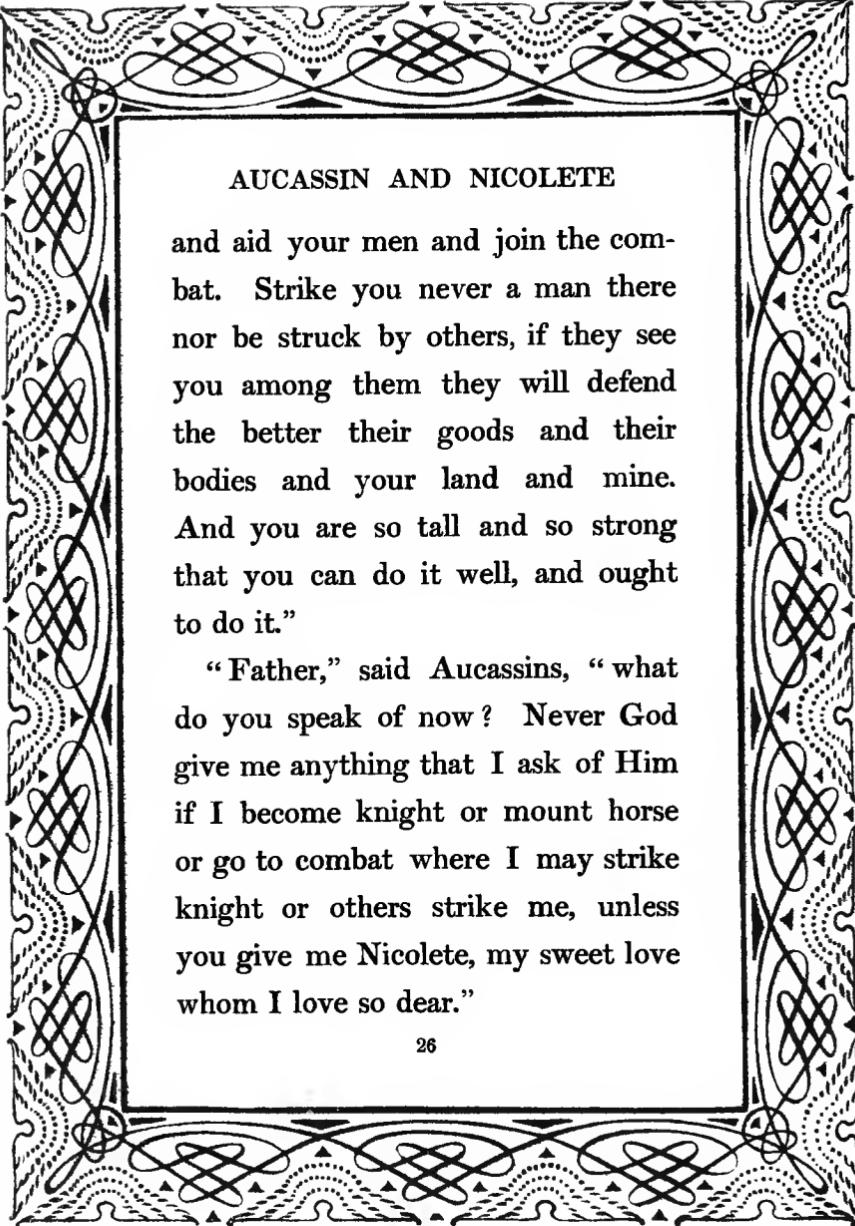


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the townsfolk mounted to the galleries of the walls and threw down bolts and sharpened stakes.

While the assault was great and at its height, then the Count Garins of Biaucaire came into the chamber where Aucassins was making moan and lamenting Nicolete, his most sweet love whom he loved so dear.

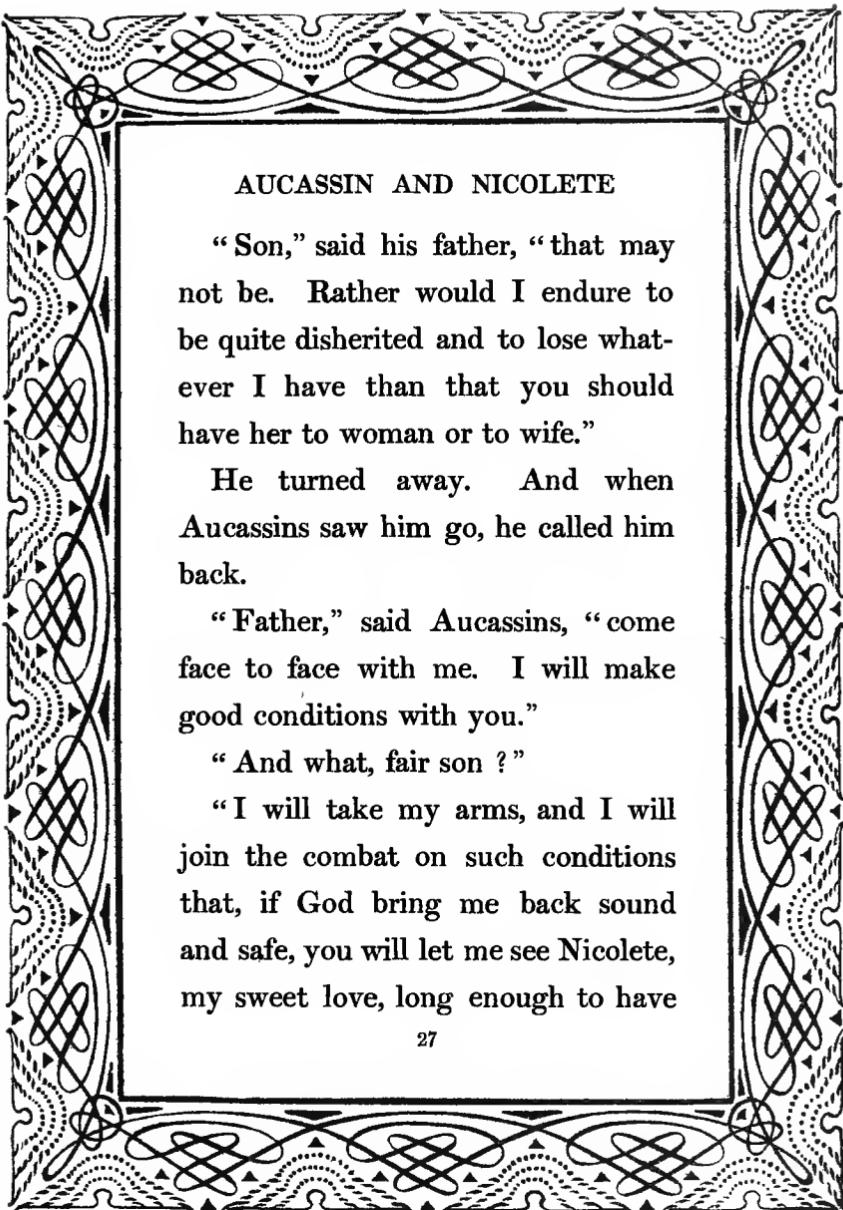
“Ha! son,” said he. “What a caitiff and a wretch are you, that you see how your castle, the best and the strongest, is attacked! And know that if you lose it you lose your heritage. Son, take arms now and mount horse and defend your land



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and aid your men and join the combat. Strike you never a man there nor be struck by others, if they see you among them they will defend the better their goods and their bodies and your land and mine. And you are so tall and so strong that you can do it well, and ought to do it."

"Father," said Aucassins, "what do you speak of now? Never God give me anything that I ask of Him if I become knight or mount horse or go to combat where I may strike knight or others strike me, unless you give me Nicolete, my sweet love whom I love so dear."



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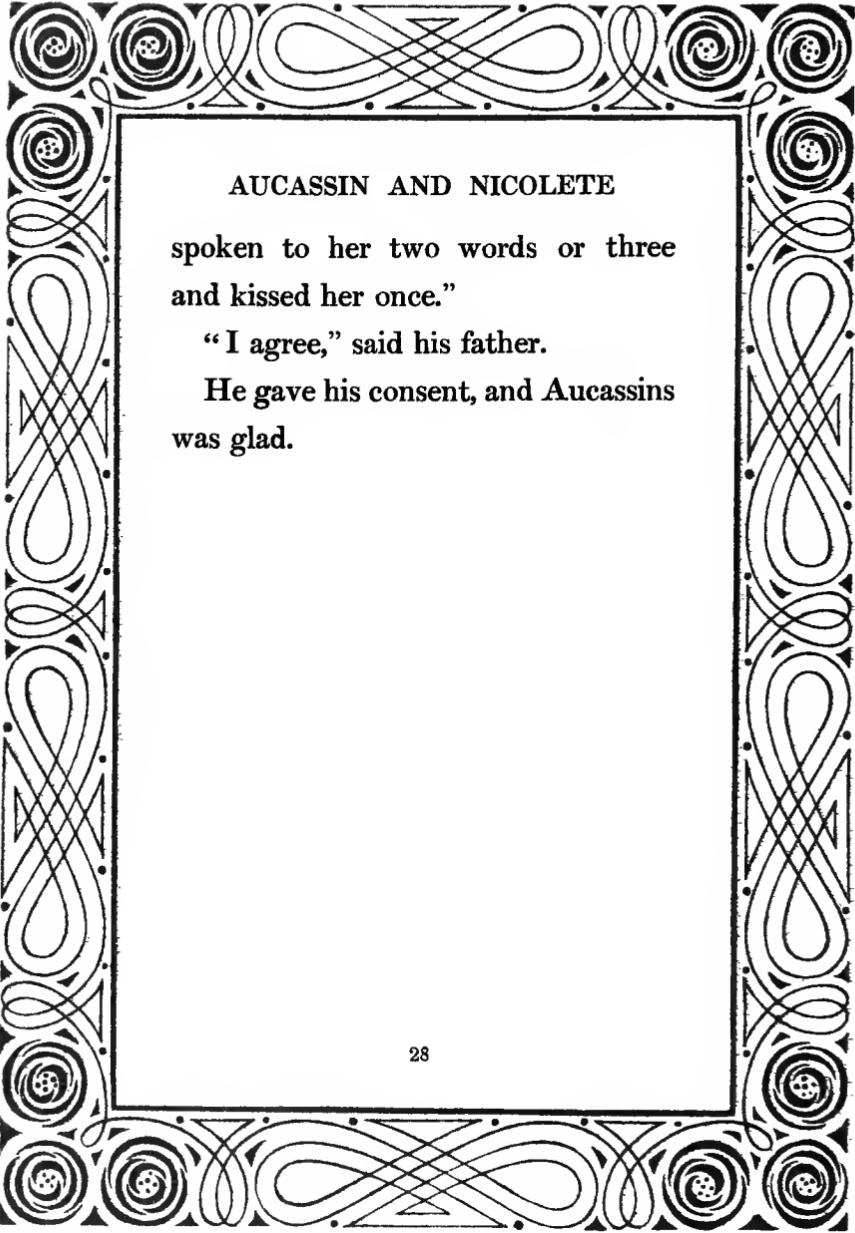
“Son,” said his father, “that may not be. Rather would I endure to be quite disherited and to lose whatever I have than that you should have her to woman or to wife.”

He turned away. And when Aucassins saw him go, he called him back.

“Father,” said Aucassins, “come face to face with me. I will make good conditions with you.”

“And what, fair son?”

“I will take my arms, and I will join the combat on such conditions that, if God bring me back sound and safe, you will let me see Nicolette, my sweet love, long enough to have

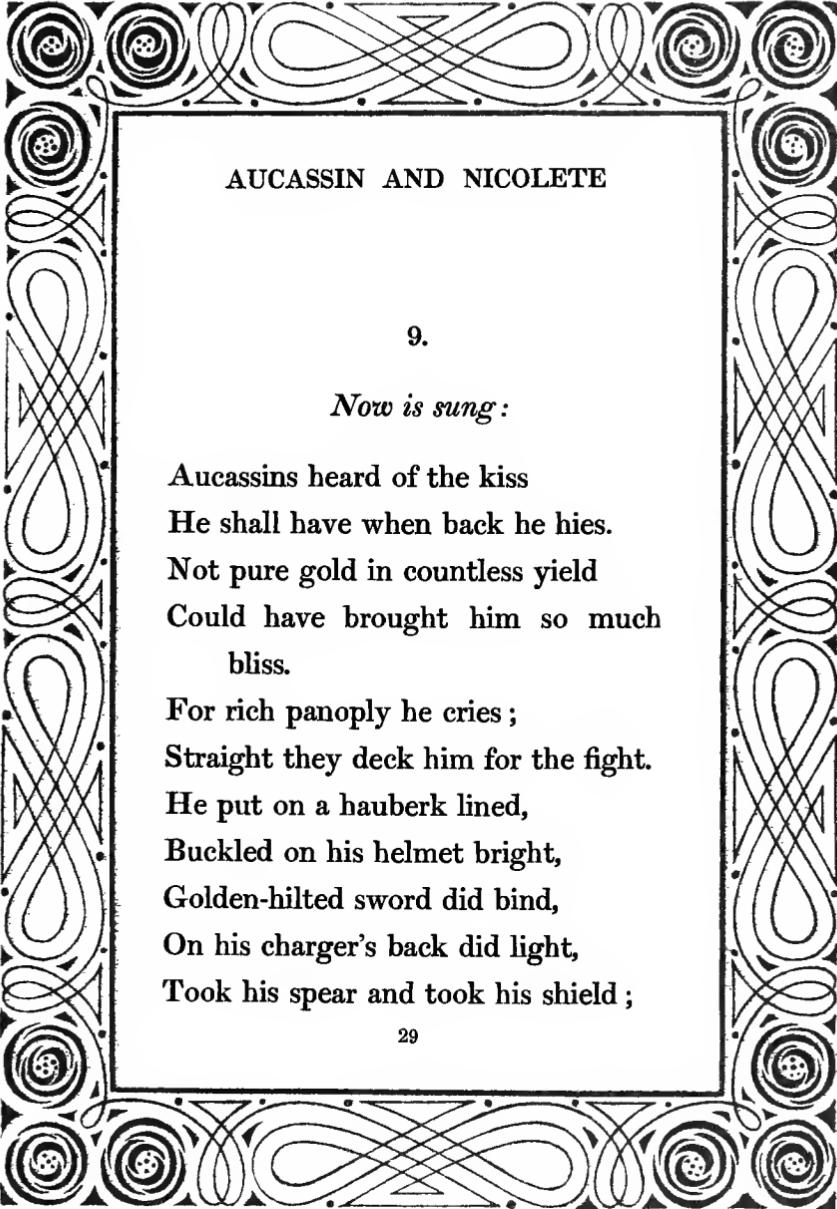


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spoken to her two words or three
and kissed her once.”

“I agree,” said his father.

He gave his consent, and Aucassins
was glad.



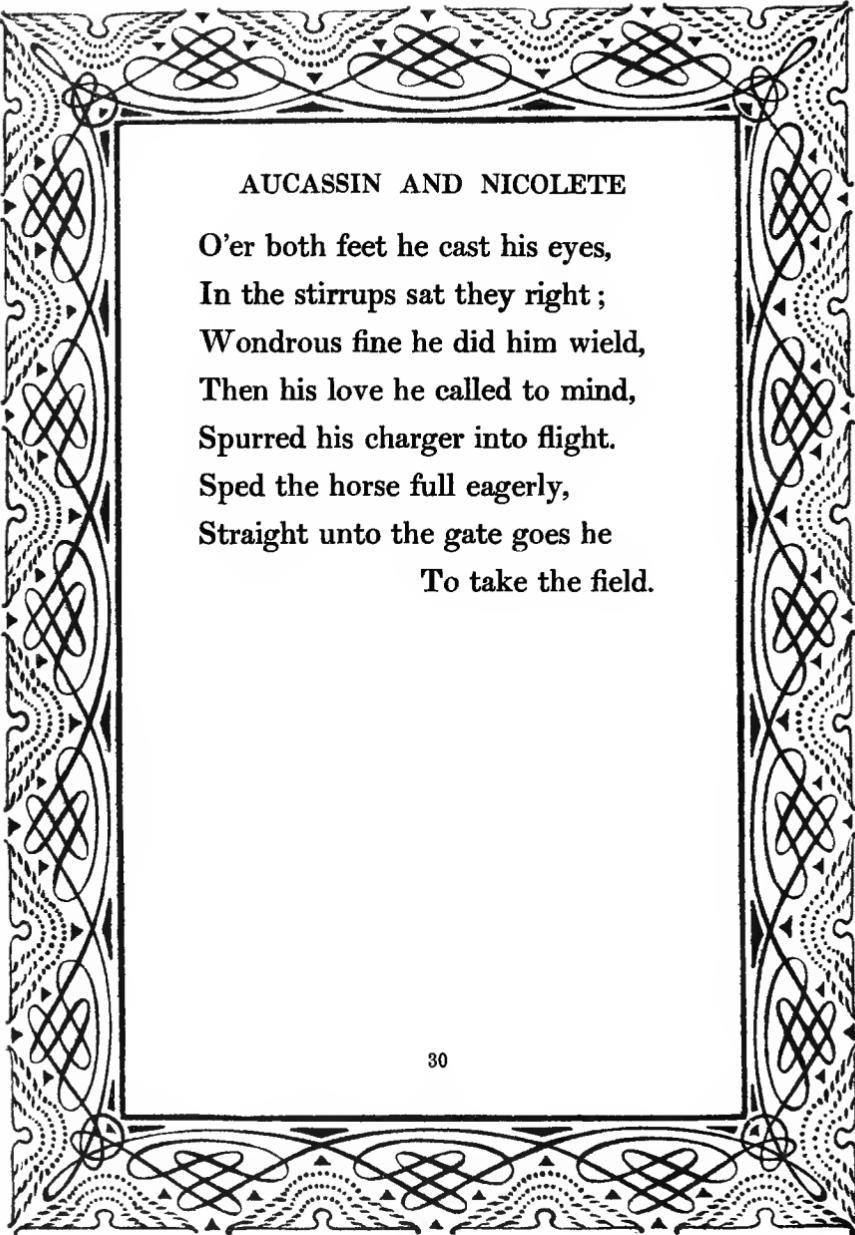
AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

9.

Now is sung :

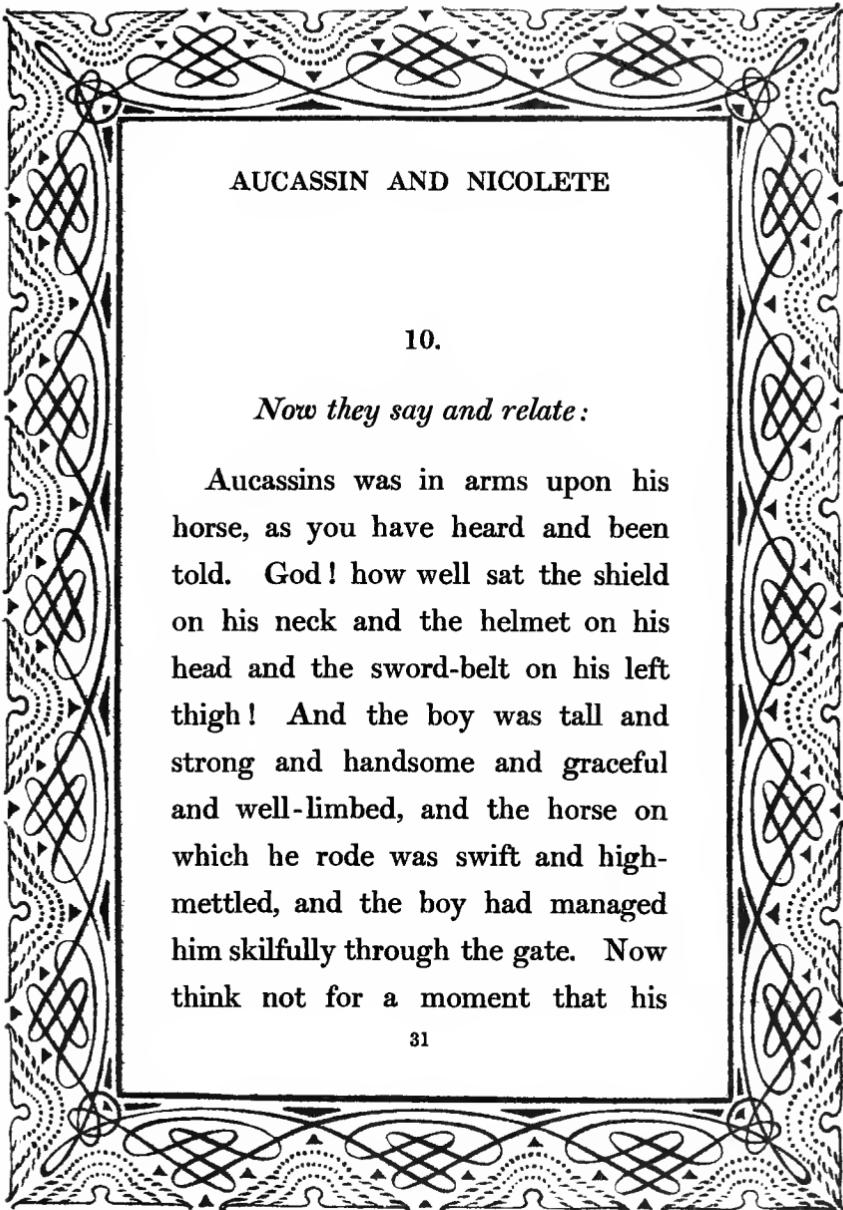
Aucassins heard of the kiss
He shall have when back he hies.
Not pure gold in countless yield
Could have brought him so much
bliss.

For rich panoply he cries ;
Straight they deck him for the fight.
He put on a hauberk lined,
Buckled on his helmet bright,
Golden-hilted sword did bind,
On his charger's back did light,
Took his spear and took his shield ;



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O'er both feet he cast his eyes,
In the stirrups sat they right ;
Wondrous fine he did him wield,
Then his love he called to mind,
Spurred his charger into flight.
Sped the horse full eagerly,
Straight unto the gate goes he
To take the field.



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10.

Now they say and relate :

Aucassins was in arms upon his horse, as you have heard and been told. God ! how well sat the shield on his neck and the helmet on his head and the sword-belt on his left thigh ! And the boy was tall and strong and handsome and graceful and well-limbed, and the horse on which he rode was swift and high-mettled, and the boy had managed him skilfully through the gate. Now think not for a moment that his



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mind was set on taking oxen nor cows nor goats, nor that he would have struck knight nor others he! Not so! Never once did he remember these, but he thought so much of Nicolete, his sweet love, that he forgot his reins and what it was he must do. And his horse which had felt his spurs carried him into the press and rushed among the enemy. And they laid hands upon him from all sides and took him and stripped him of his shield and of his lance, and they led him away all suddenly a prisoner, and as they went they were already discussing by what death they should make



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him die. And when Aucassins heard it :

“ Ah God ! ” said he, “ sweet Son of God ! Are these my mortal enemies who here lead me away and who soon will cut off my head ? And when I have had my head cut off, never shall I speak to Nicolete, my sweet love whom I love so dear. Yet have I here a good sword and ride on a good horse untired. If now I do not defend myself for her, God help her never if she love me more ! ”

The boy was tall and strong, and the horse on which he rode was restive. And he put his hand to



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his sword, and began to strike to right and left, and clove helms and nasals and fists and arms, and made carnage round him like the boar when the dogs assail him in the forest, so that he struck down ten of their knights and wounded seven, and threw himself straight through the press and came galloping back, sword in hand.

The Count Bougars of Valence heard that they were about to hang Aucassin his enemy, and he came that way and Aucassins knew him well. He took his sword in his hand, and struck him through the helmet so that he clove it to his



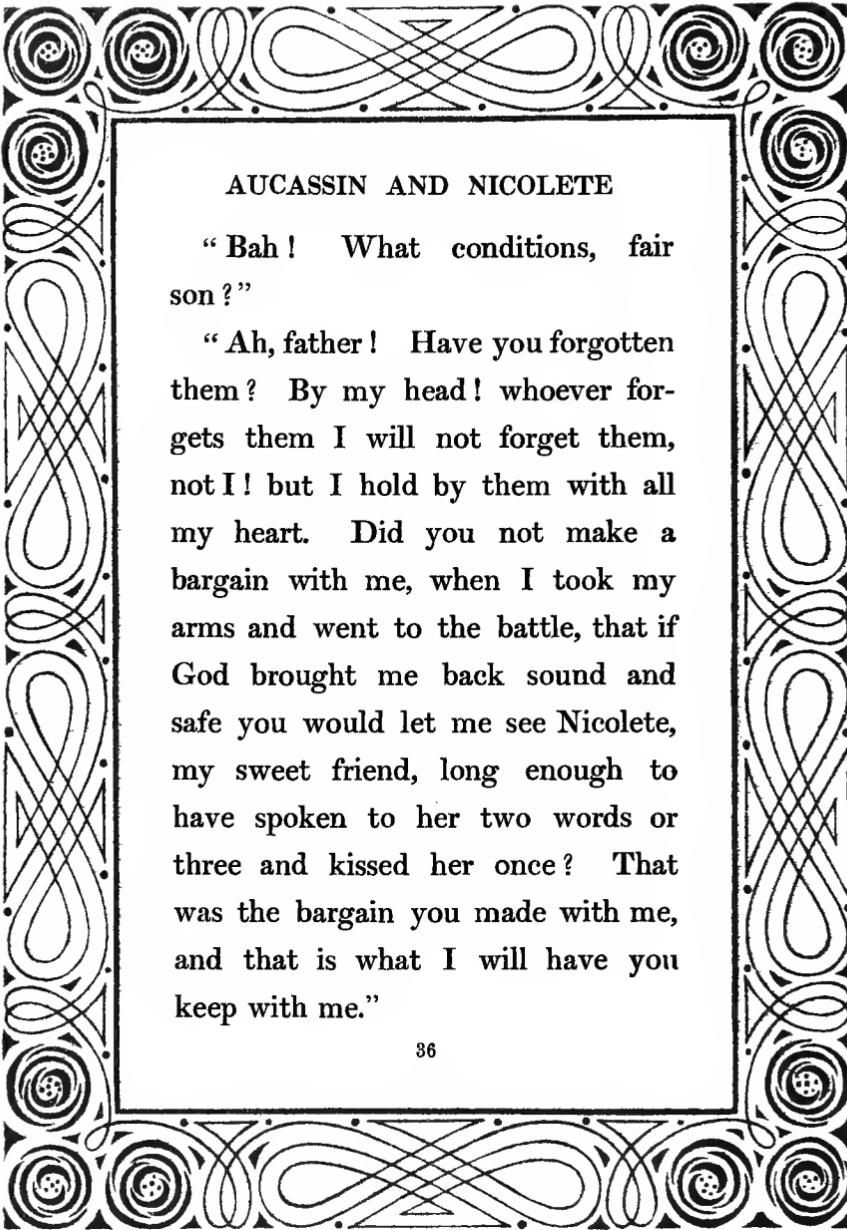
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head. He was so stunned that he fell to earth, and Aucassins reached his hand and took him and led him by the nasal of his helmet and gave him up to his father.

“Father,” said Aucassins, “here is your enemy who has so warred on you and done you harm. Twenty years has this war lasted already ; and never could it be ended by man.”

“Fair son !” said his father. “Your feats of youth befit you, not gaping after folly !”

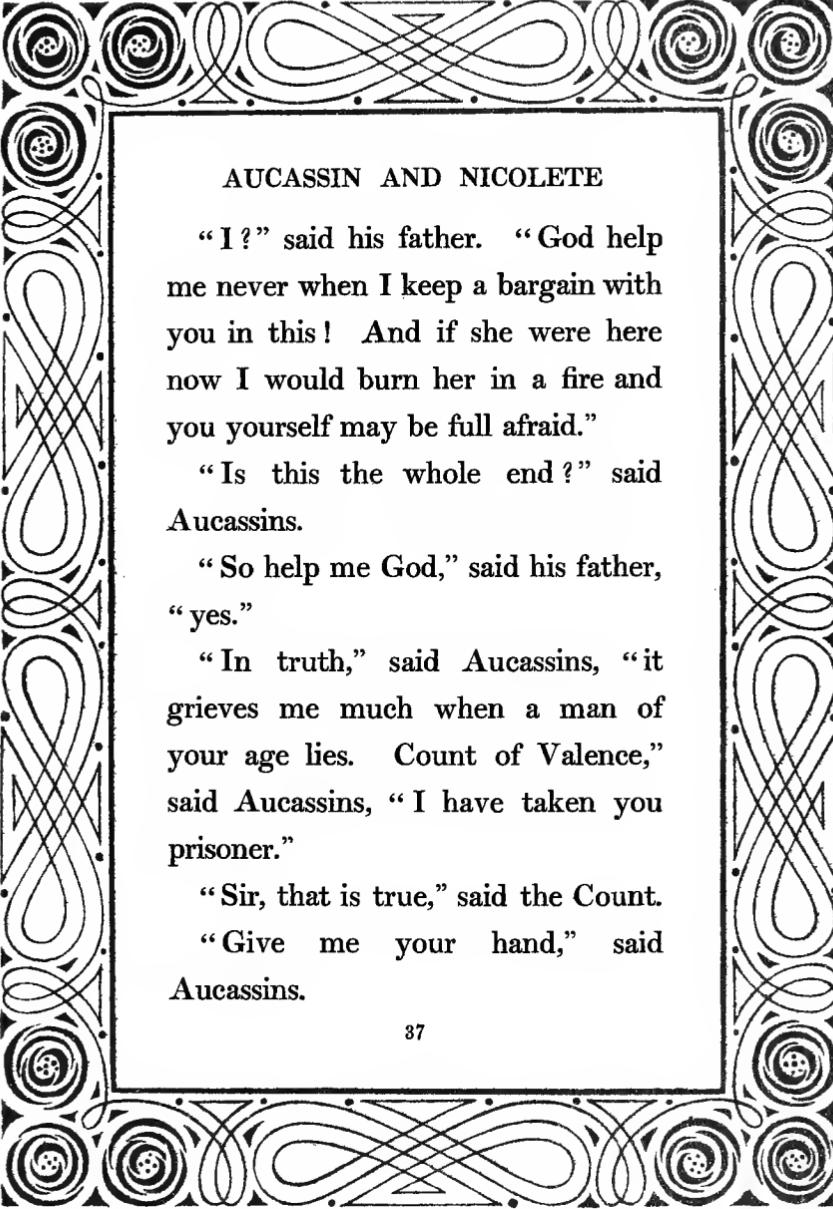
“Father,” said Aucassins, “do not go preaching to me, but keep with me my conditions.”



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“Bah! What conditions, fair son?”

“Ah, father! Have you forgotten them? By my head! whoever forgets them I will not forget them, not I! but I hold by them with all my heart. Did you not make a bargain with me, when I took my arms and went to the battle, that if God brought me back sound and safe you would let me see Nicolete, my sweet friend, long enough to have spoken to her two words or three and kissed her once? That was the bargain you made with me, and that is what I will have you keep with me.”



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“I?” said his father. “God help me never when I keep a bargain with you in this! And if she were here now I would burn her in a fire and you yourself may be full afraid.”

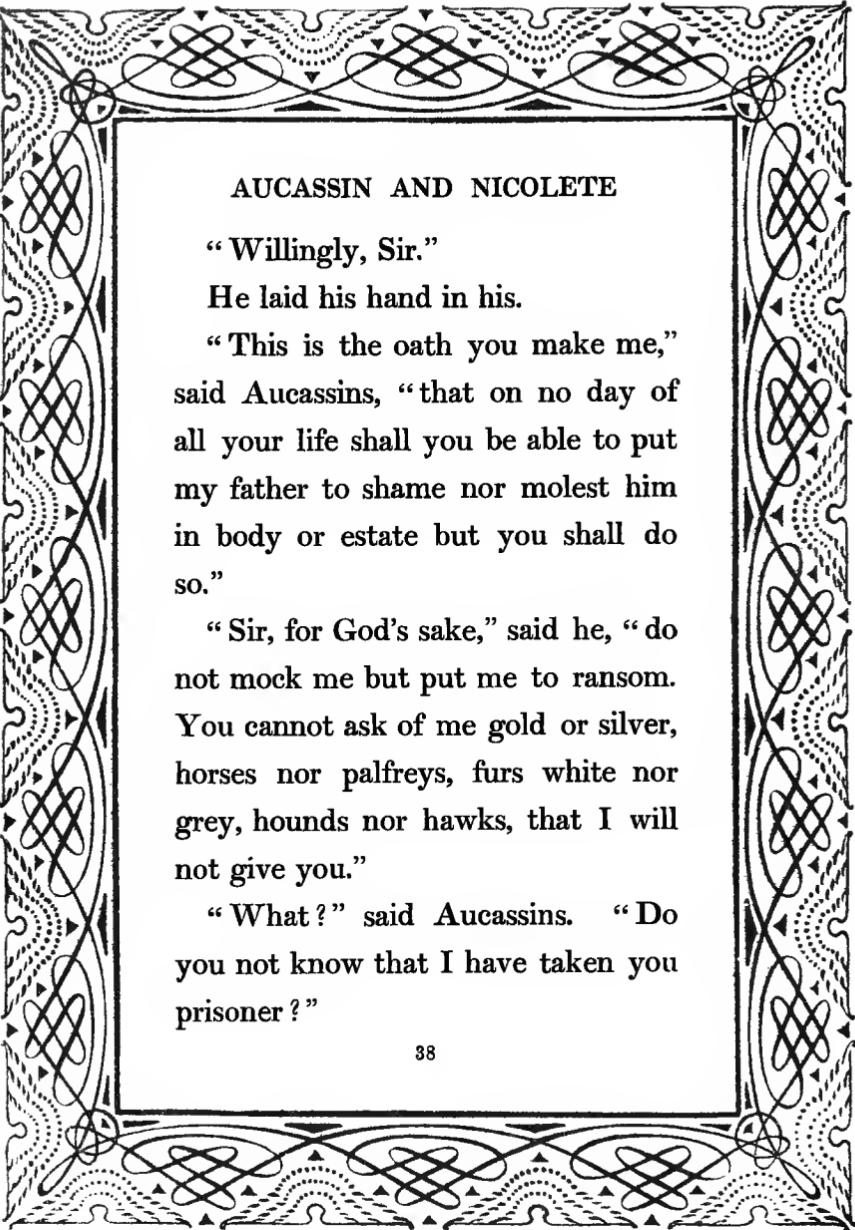
“Is this the whole end?” said Aucassins.

“So help me God,” said his father, “yes.”

“In truth,” said Aucassins, “it grieves me much when a man of your age lies. Count of Valence,” said Aucassins, “I have taken you prisoner.”

“Sir, that is true,” said the Count.

“Give me your hand,” said Aucassins.



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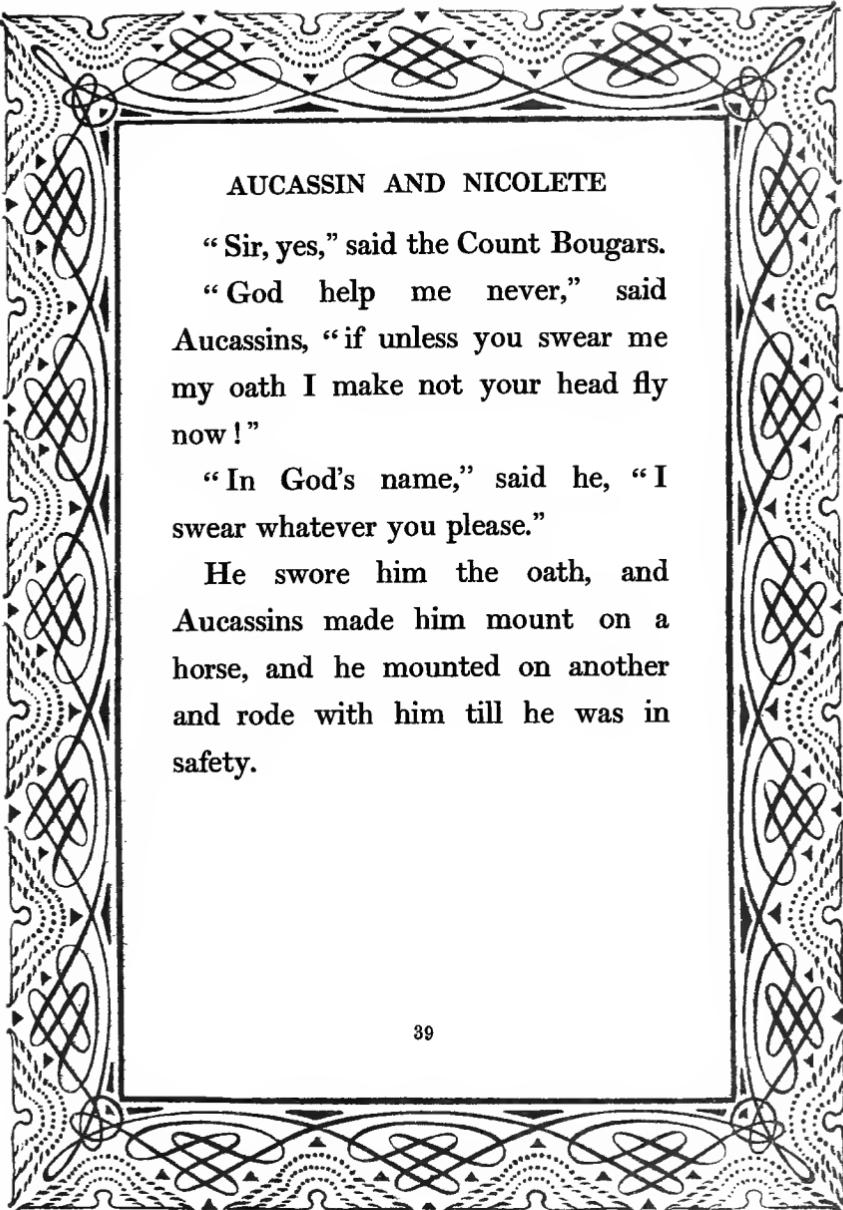
“Willingly, Sir.”

He laid his hand in his.

“This is the oath you make me,” said Aucassins, “that on no day of all your life shall you be able to put my father to shame nor molest him in body or estate but you shall do so.”

“Sir, for God’s sake,” said he, “do not mock me but put me to ransom. You cannot ask of me gold or silver, horses nor palfreys, furs white nor grey, hounds nor hawks, that I will not give you.”

“What?” said Aucassins. “Do you not know that I have taken you prisoner?”



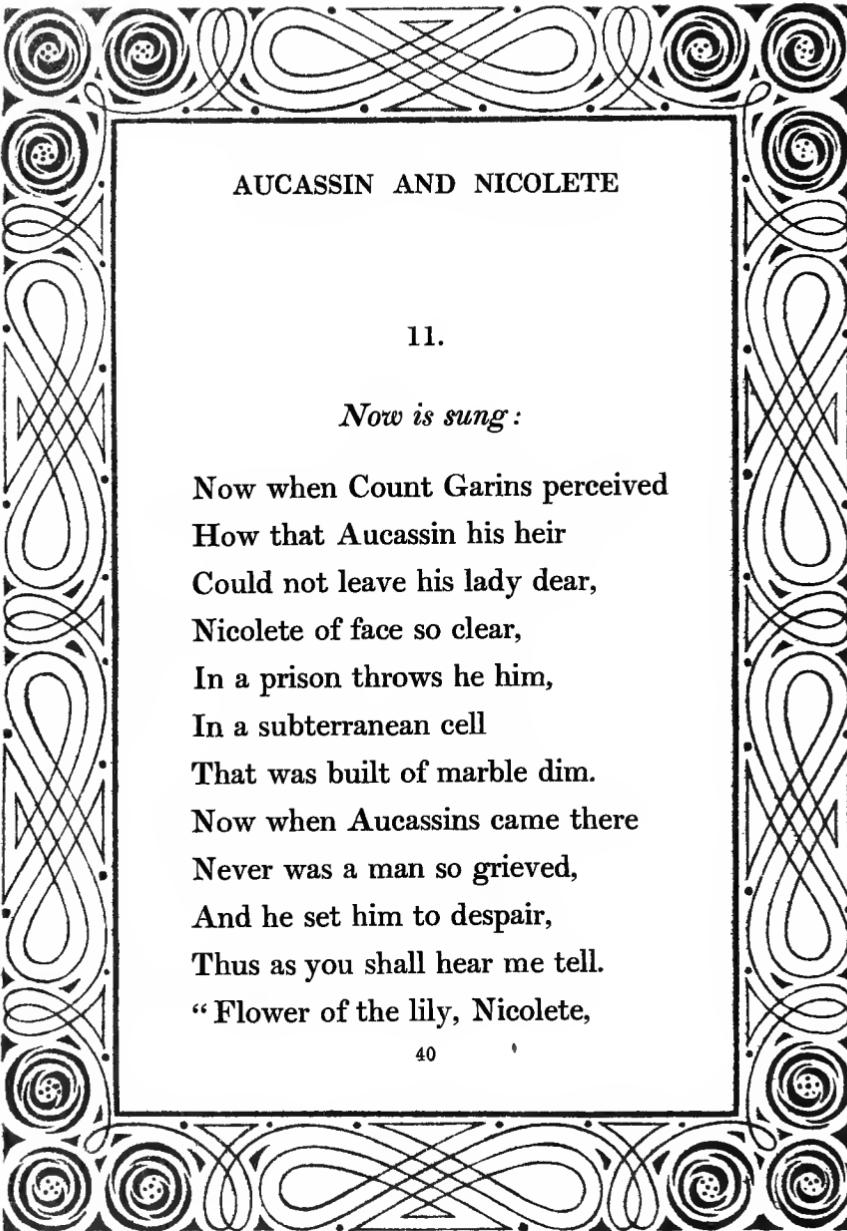
AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

“Sir, yes,” said the Count Bougars.

“God help me never,” said Aucassins, “if unless you swear me my oath I make not your head fly now!”

“In God’s name,” said he, “I swear whatever you please.”

He swore him the oath, and Aucassins made him mount on a horse, and he mounted on another and rode with him till he was in safety.

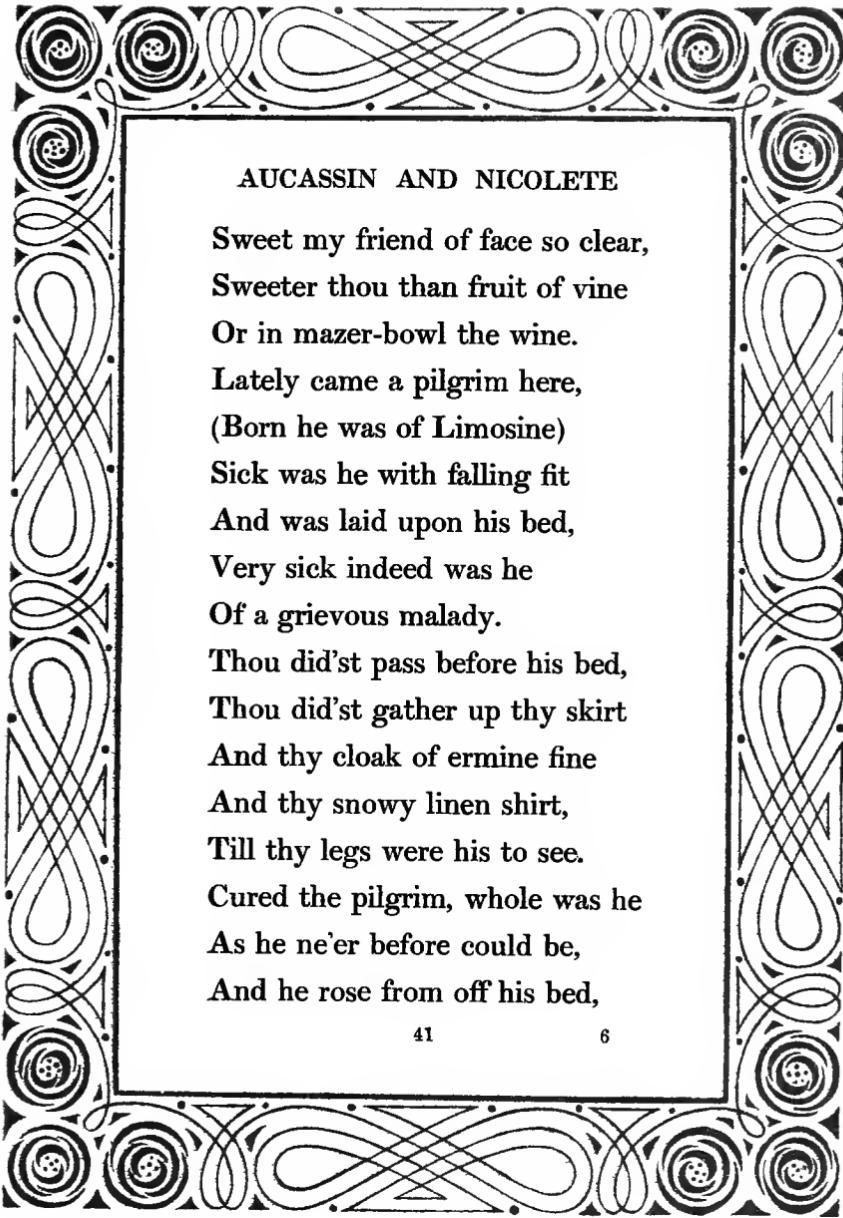


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11.

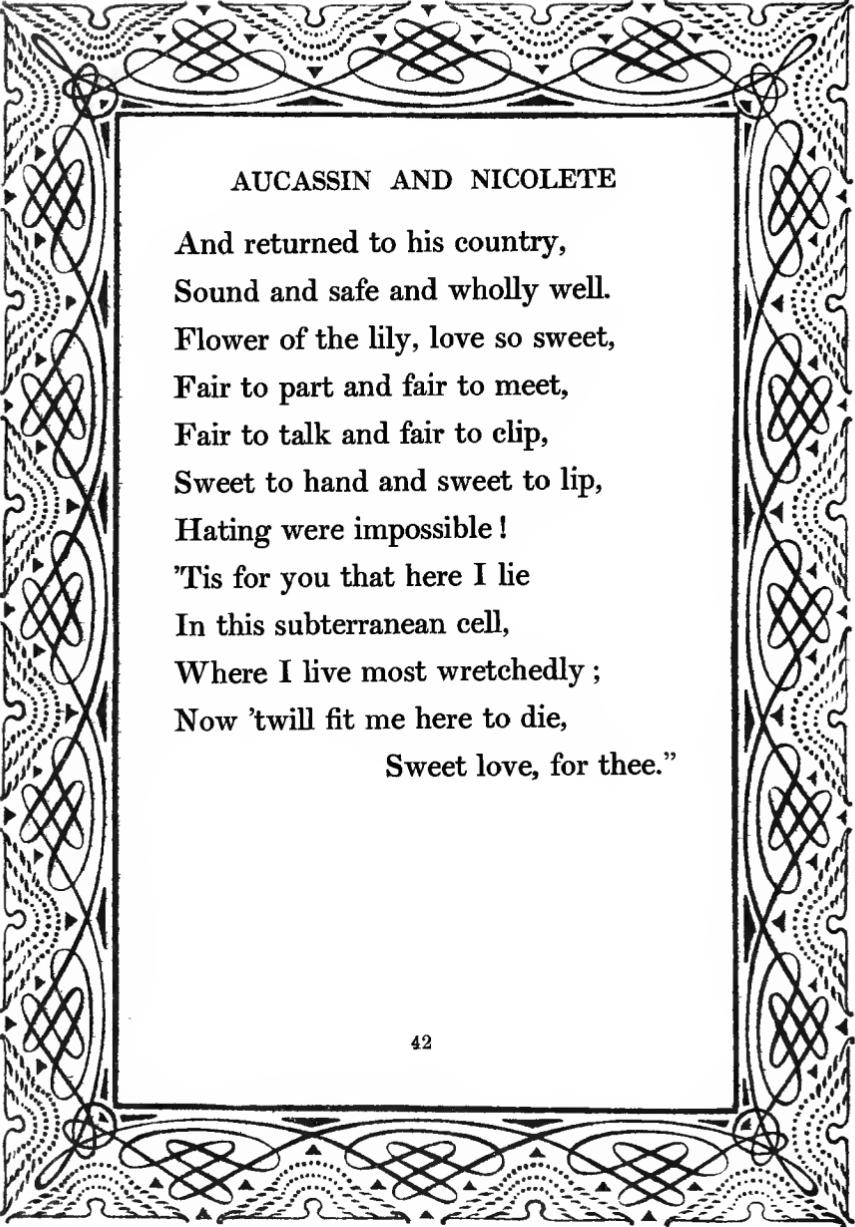
Now is sung :

Now when Count Garins perceived
How that Aucassin his heir
Could not leave his lady dear,
Nicolete of face so clear,
In a prison throws he him,
In a subterranean cell
That was built of marble dim.
Now when Aucassins came there
Never was a man so grieved,
And he set him to despair,
Thus as you shall hear me tell.
“ Flower of the lily, Nicolete,



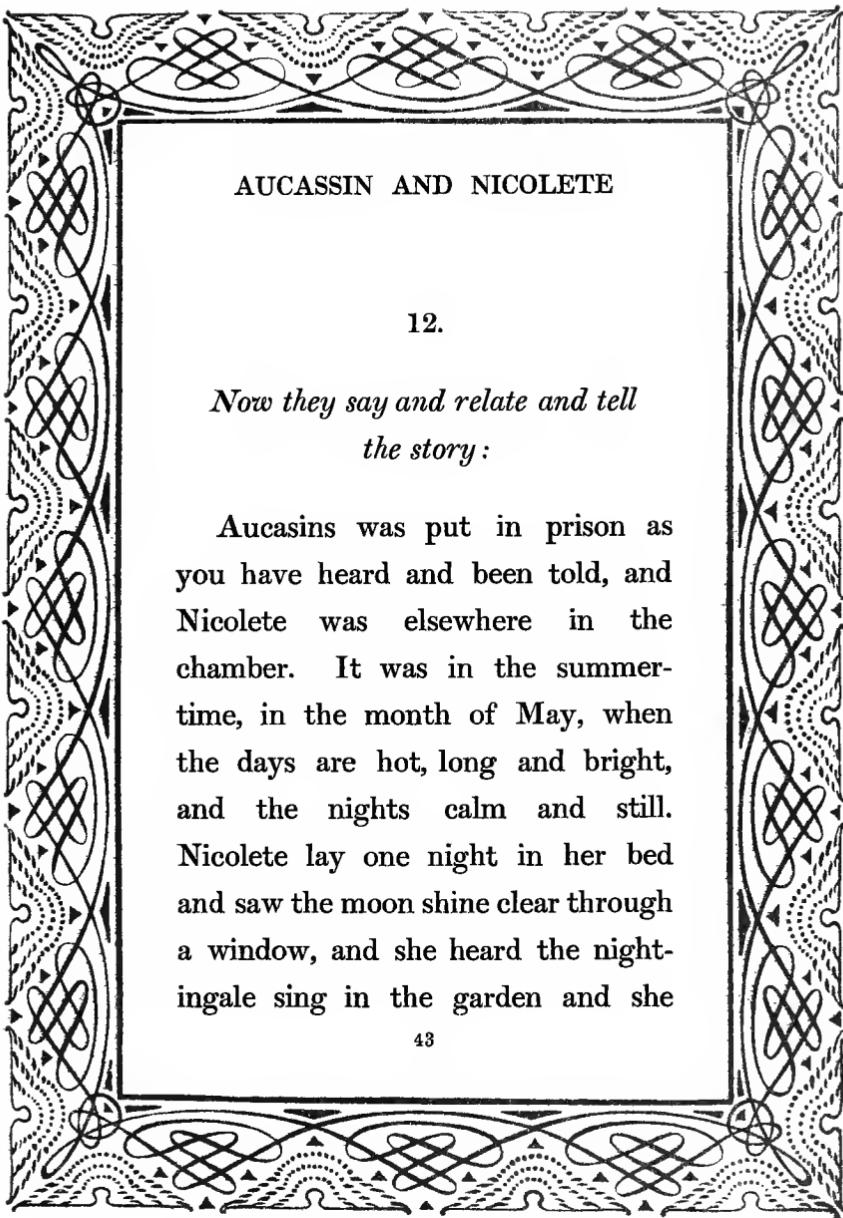
AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

Sweet my friend of face so clear,
Sweeter thou than fruit of vine
Or in mazer-bowl the wine.
Lately came a pilgrim here,
(Born he was of Limosine)
Sick was he with falling fit
And was laid upon his bed,
Very sick indeed was he
Of a grievous malady.
Thou did'st pass before his bed,
Thou did'st gather up thy skirt
And thy cloak of ermine fine
And thy snowy linen shirt,
Till thy legs were his to see.
Cured the pilgrim, whole was he
As he ne'er before could be,
And he rose from off his bed,



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And returned to his country,
Sound and safe and wholly well.
Flower of the lily, love so sweet,
Fair to part and fair to meet,
Fair to talk and fair to clip,
Sweet to hand and sweet to lip,
Hating were impossible !
'Tis for you that here I lie
In this subterranean cell,
Where I live most wretchedly ;
Now 'twill fit me here to die,
Sweet love, for thee."



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12.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story:*

Aucasins was put in prison as you have heard and been told, and Nicolete was elsewhere in the chamber. It was in the summer-time, in the month of May, when the days are hot, long and bright, and the nights calm and still. Nicolete lay one night in her bed and saw the moon shine clear through a window, and she heard the nightingale sing in the garden and she



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remembered Aucassin, her friend, whom she loved so dear. And she began to think about the Count Garin of Biaucaire who hated her with a deadly hate, and she thought to herself that she would stay no longer there ; that if she were denounced, and the Count Garins knew it, he would make her die an evil death. She felt that the old woman who was with her was asleep. She got up and put on a gown of silk cloth, a very good one that she had, and took bed-clothes and towels and tied them one to the other and made a rope as long as she could, and tied it to the mullion of the



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window and climbed down into the garden, and took her gown in one hand before and the other hand behind, and tucked up her skirt because of the dew which she saw was heavy on the grass, and escaped down the garden.

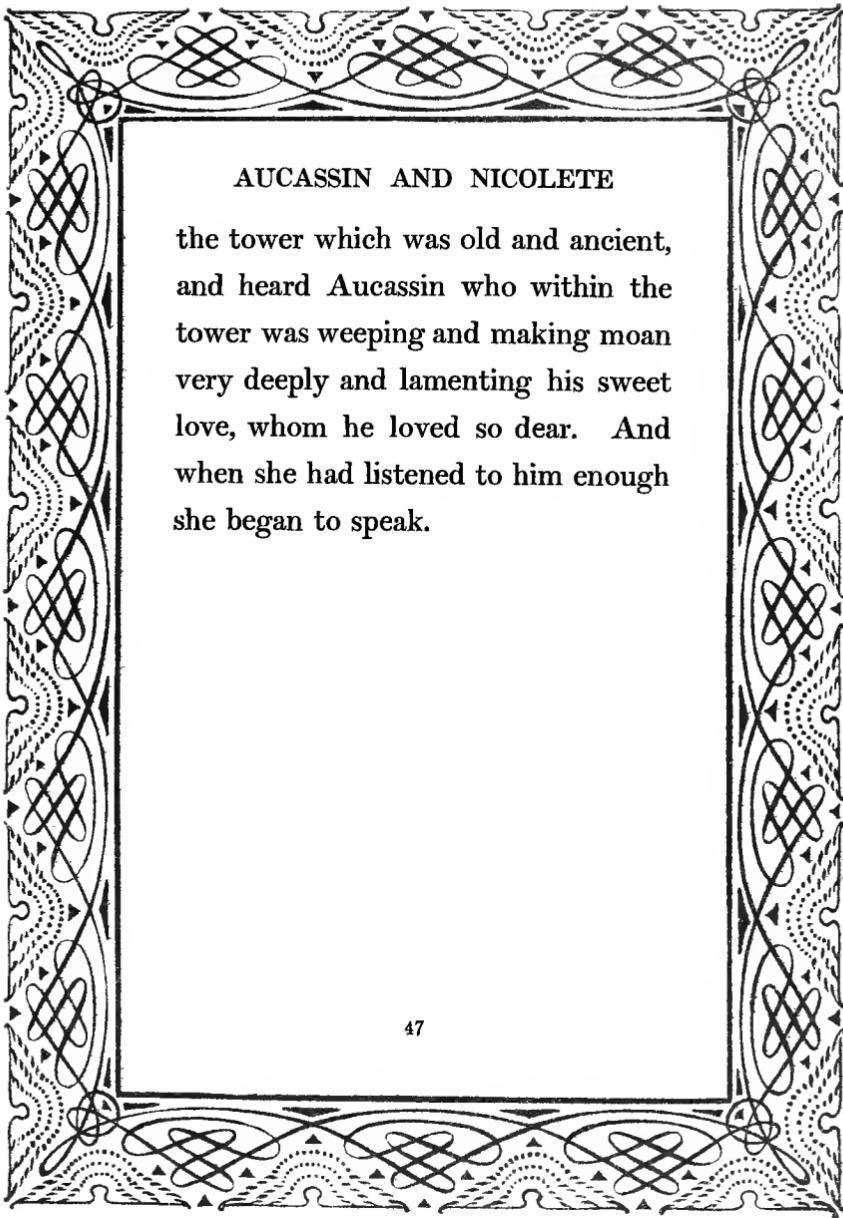
She had fair hair and close curling, and bright and laughing eyes and a shapely face, and a straight and well-set nose, and lips that were redder than the cherry or the rose in the summer-time, and white small teeth, and firm little breasts that lifted up her dress as if they had been two walnuts ; and she was so slender in the sides that you could have clasped



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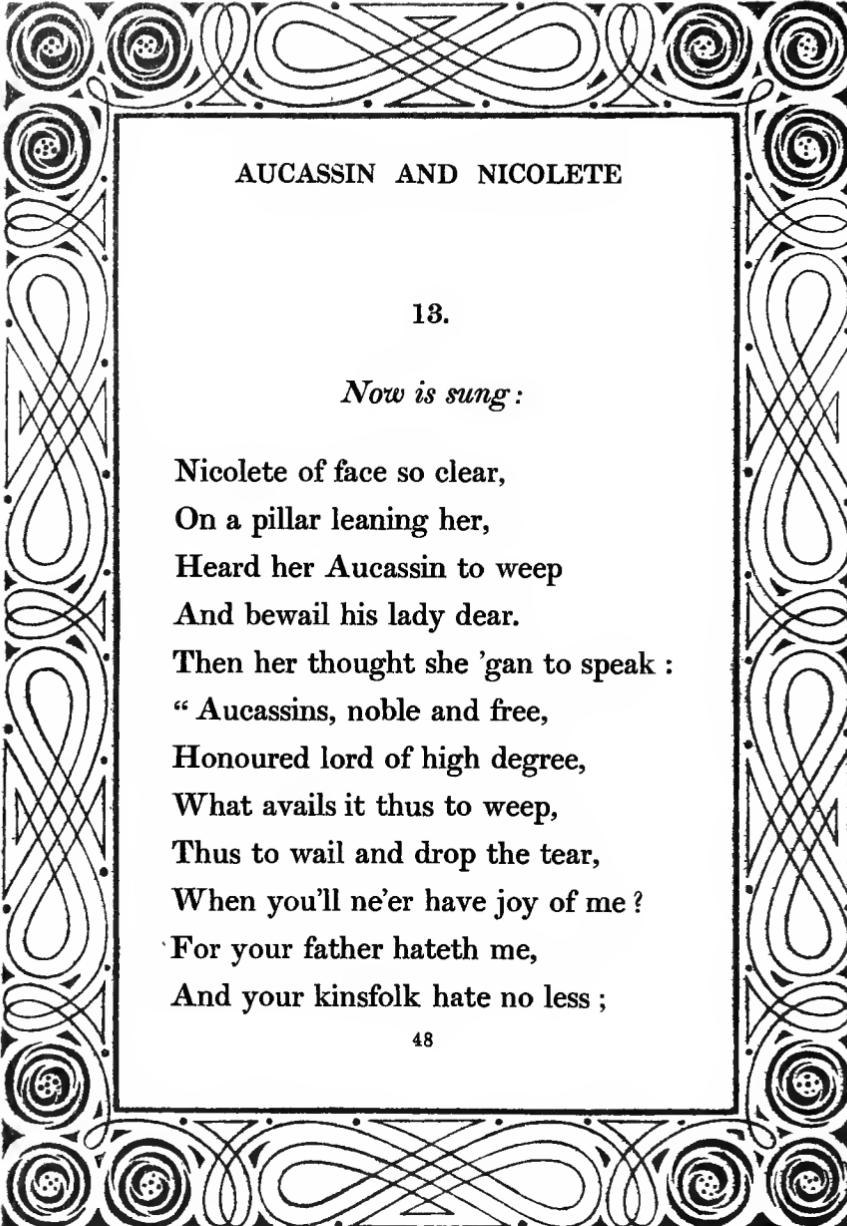
her in your two hands, and the flowers of the daisies that she broke with the toes of her feet and which lay upon her instep were quite black by her feet and her legs, so very white was the girl.

She came to the postern and opened it, and went through it along the streets of Biaucaire on the side where the shadow lay, for the moon was shining very bright, and she walked on till she came to the tower where her lover was. The tower was split here and there, and she crouched close to one of the pillars and wrapped herself in her mantle, and put her head through a gap in



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the tower which was old and ancient,
and heard Aucassin who within the
tower was weeping and making moan
very deeply and lamenting his sweet
love, whom he loved so dear. And
when she had listened to him enough
she began to speak.



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13.

Now is sung :

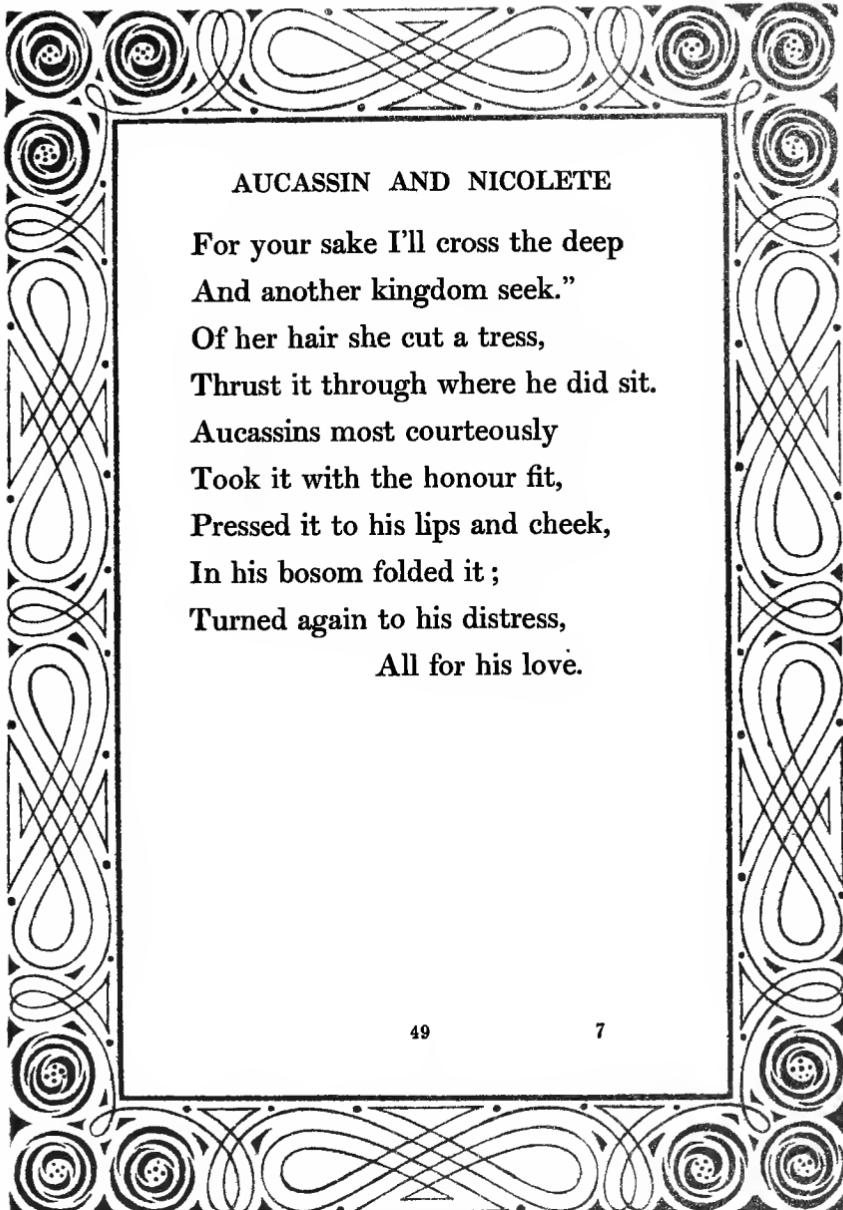
Nicolete of face so clear,
On a pillar leaning her,
Heard her Aucassin to weep
And bewail his lady dear.
Then her thought she 'gan to speak :
“ Aucassins, noble and free,
Honoured lord of high degree,
What avails it thus to weep,
Thus to wail and drop the tear,
When you'll ne'er have joy of me ?
For your father hateth me,
And your kinsfolk hate no less ;

• •

‘Took her gown in one hand before and the other hand behind, and tucked up her skirt because of the dew which she saw was heavy on the grass, and escaped down the garden.’

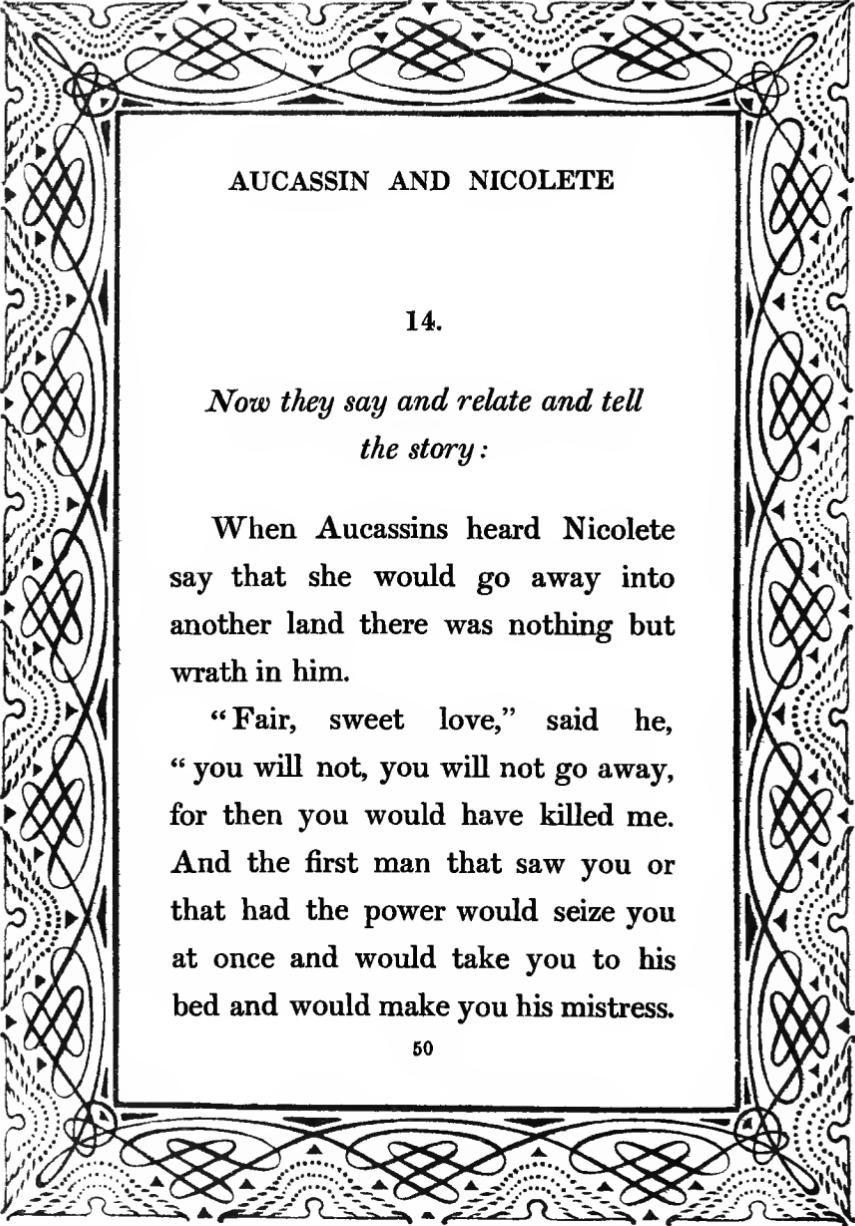
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For your sake I'll cross the deep
And another kingdom seek."
Of her hair she cut a tress,
Thrust it through where he did sit.
Aucassins most courteously
Took it with the honour fit,
Pressed it to his lips and cheek,
In his bosom folded it ;
Turned again to his distress,
All for his love.



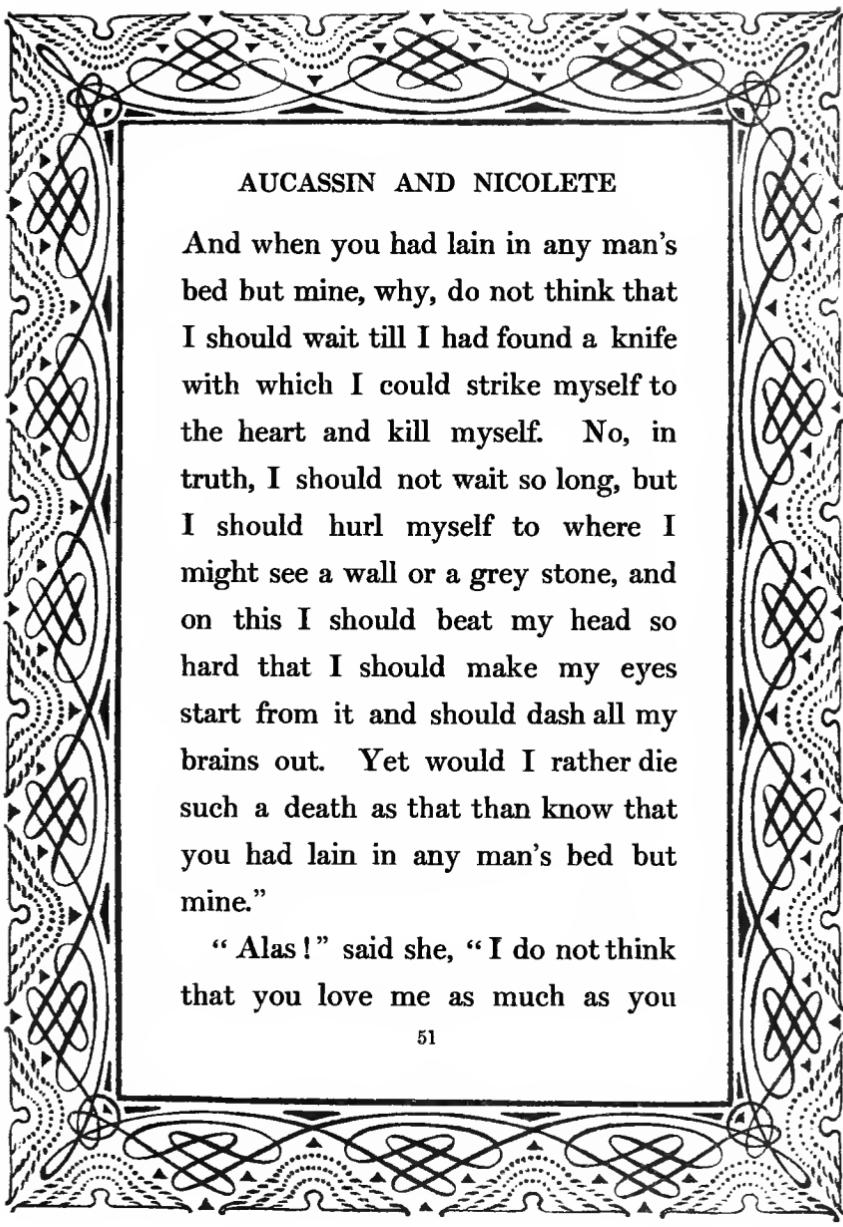
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14.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story :*

When Aucassins heard Nicolette say that she would go away into another land there was nothing but wrath in him.

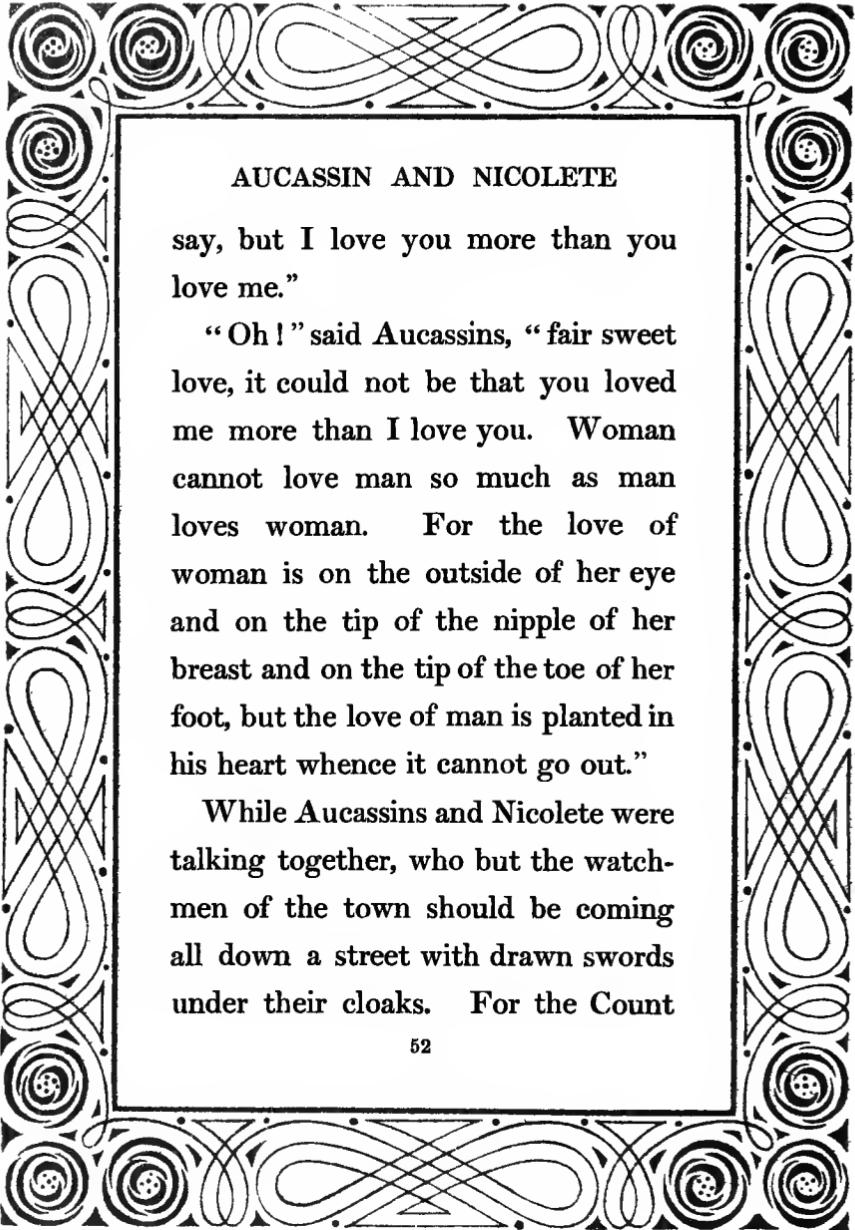
“Fair, sweet love,” said he, “you will not, you will not go away, for then you would have killed me. And the first man that saw you or that had the power would seize you at once and would take you to his bed and would make you his mistress.



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And when you had lain in any man's bed but mine, why, do not think that I should wait till I had found a knife with which I could strike myself to the heart and kill myself. No, in truth, I should not wait so long, but I should hurl myself to where I might see a wall or a grey stone, and on this I should beat my head so hard that I should make my eyes start from it and should dash all my brains out. Yet would I rather die such a death as that than know that you had lain in any man's bed but mine."

"Alas!" said she, "I do not think that you love me as much as you



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say, but I love you more than you love me."

"Oh!" said Aucassins, "fair sweet love, it could not be that you loved me more than I love you. Woman cannot love man so much as man loves woman. For the love of woman is on the outside of her eye and on the tip of the nipple of her breast and on the tip of the toe of her foot, but the love of man is planted in his heart whence it cannot go out."

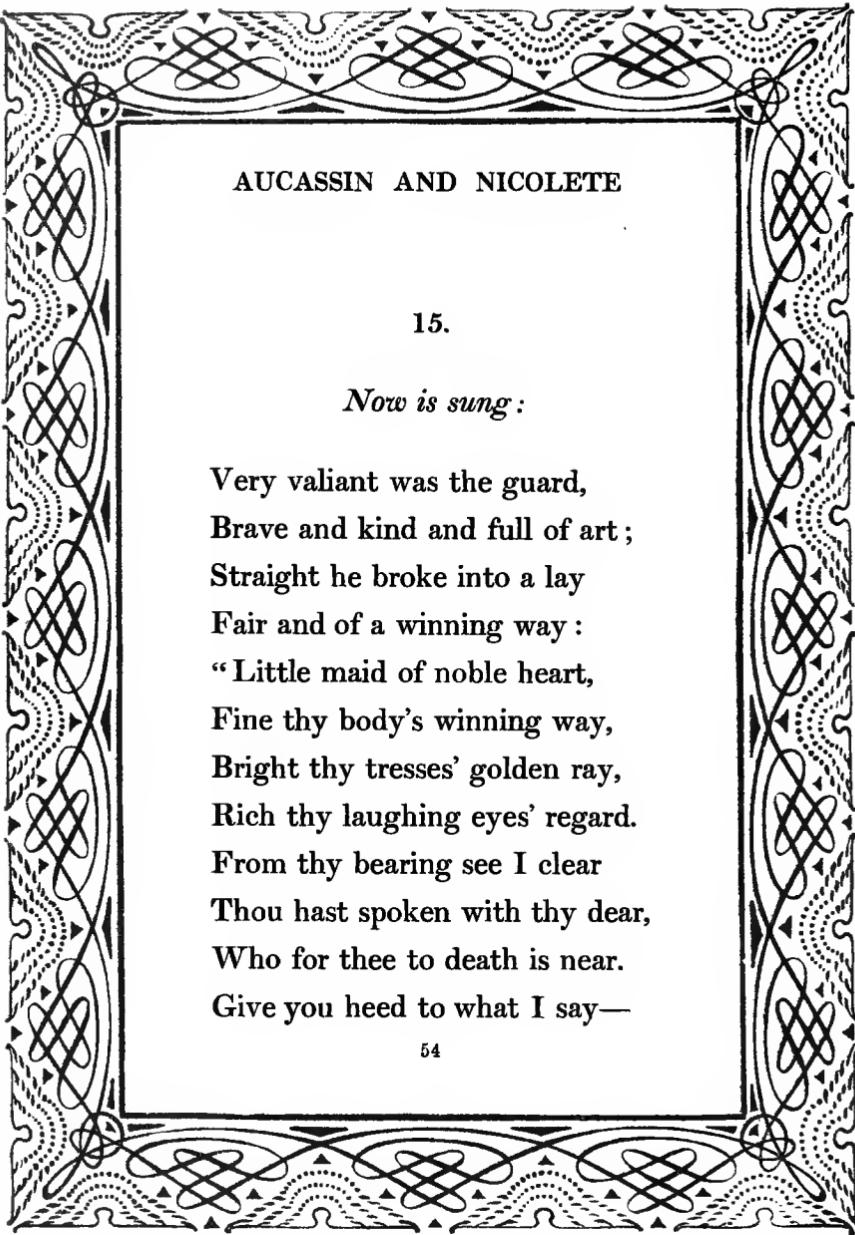
While Aucassins and Nicolette were talking together, who but the watchmen of the town should be coming all down a street with drawn swords under their cloaks. For the Count



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Garins had ordered them, if they could take her, to kill her. And the sentry who was on the tower saw them coming and heard that they were speaking of Nicolete as they came and that they were threatening to kill her.

“God !” said he. “What a great pity of so fair a girl if they kill her ! And a very great charity it would be, if I could tell her in some way they would not see, and that she should guard herself from them. For if they kill her, then will Aucassins my young lord die, which would be a great pity.”

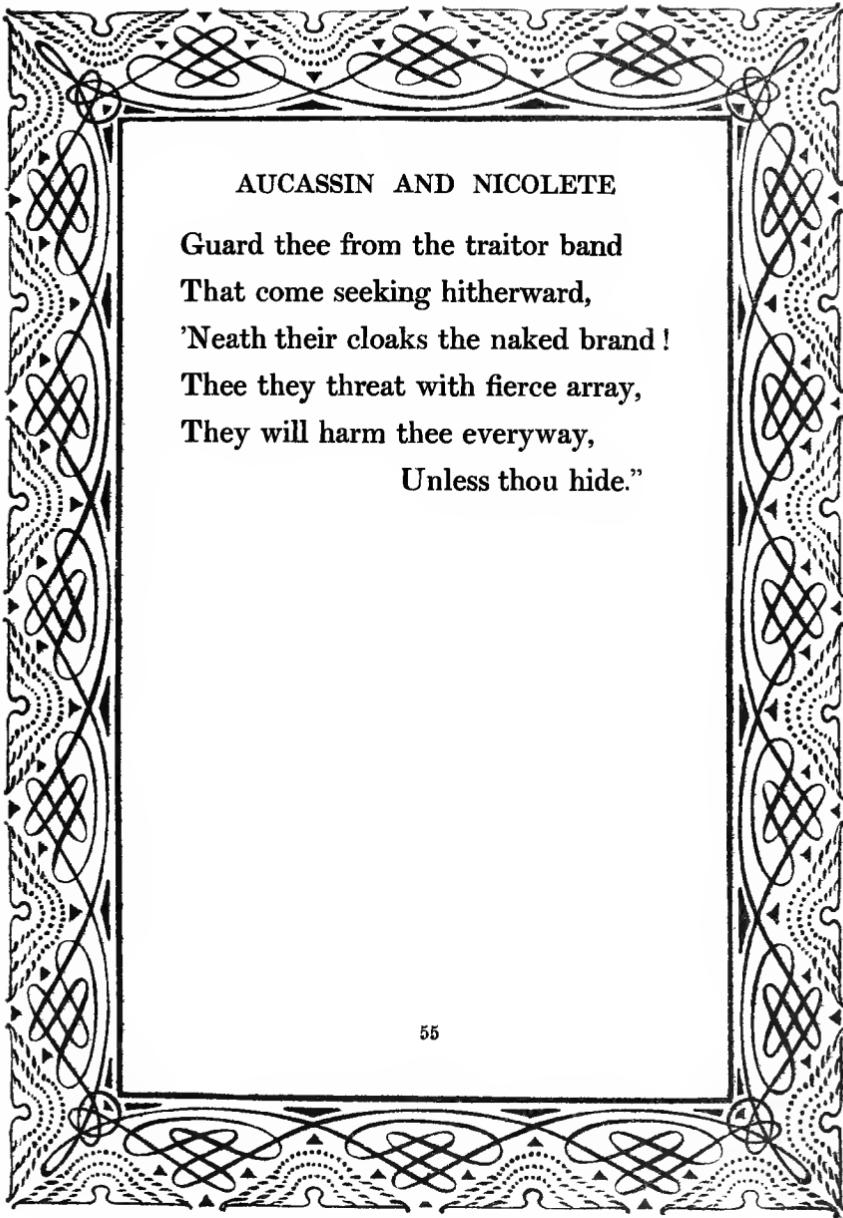


AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

15.

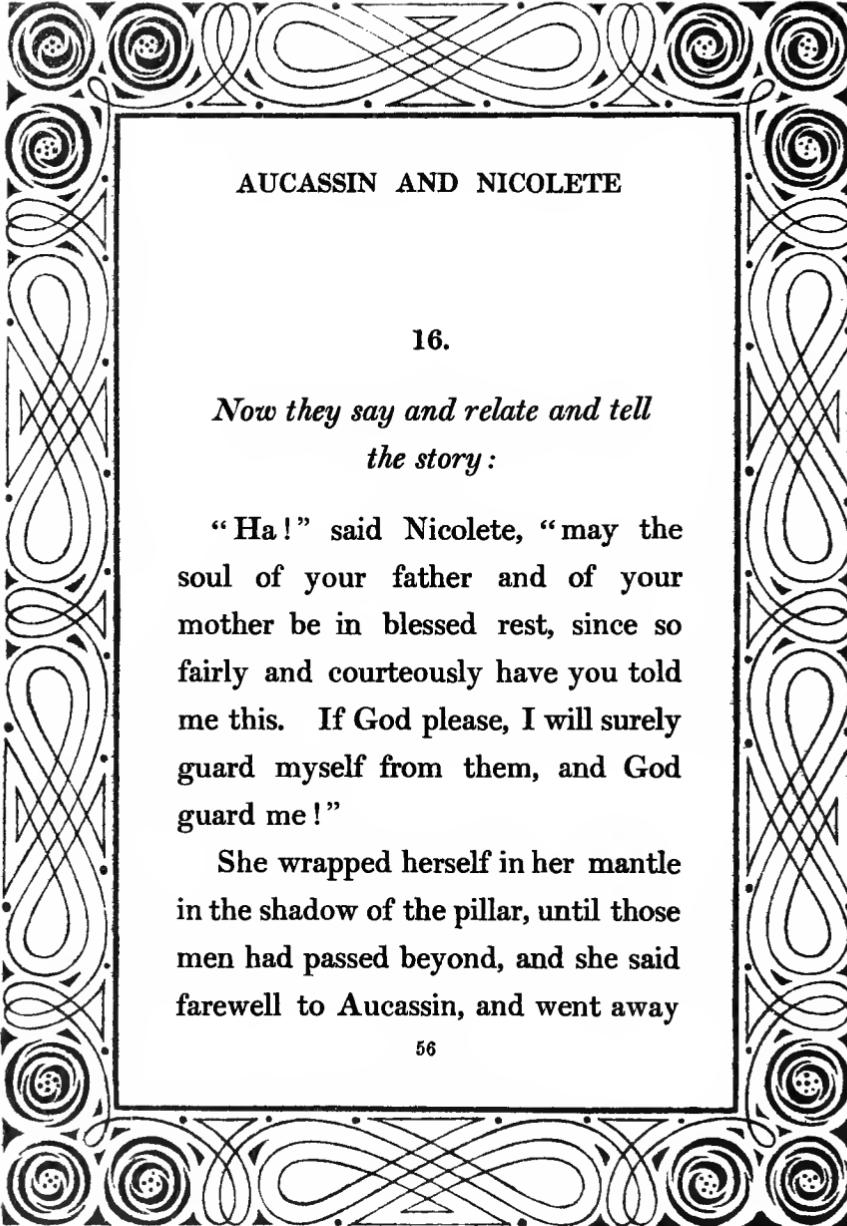
Now is sung :

Very valiant was the guard,
Brave and kind and full of art ;
Straight he broke into a lay
Fair and of a winning way :
“ Little maid of noble heart,
Fine thy body’s winning way,
Bright thy tresses’ golden ray,
Rich thy laughing eyes’ regard.
From thy bearing see I clear
Thou hast spoken with thy dear,
Who for thee to death is near.
Give you heed to what I say—



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

Guard thee from the traitor band
That come seeking hitherward,
'Neath their cloaks the naked brand !
Thee they threat with fierce array,
They will harm thee everyway,
Unless thou hide."



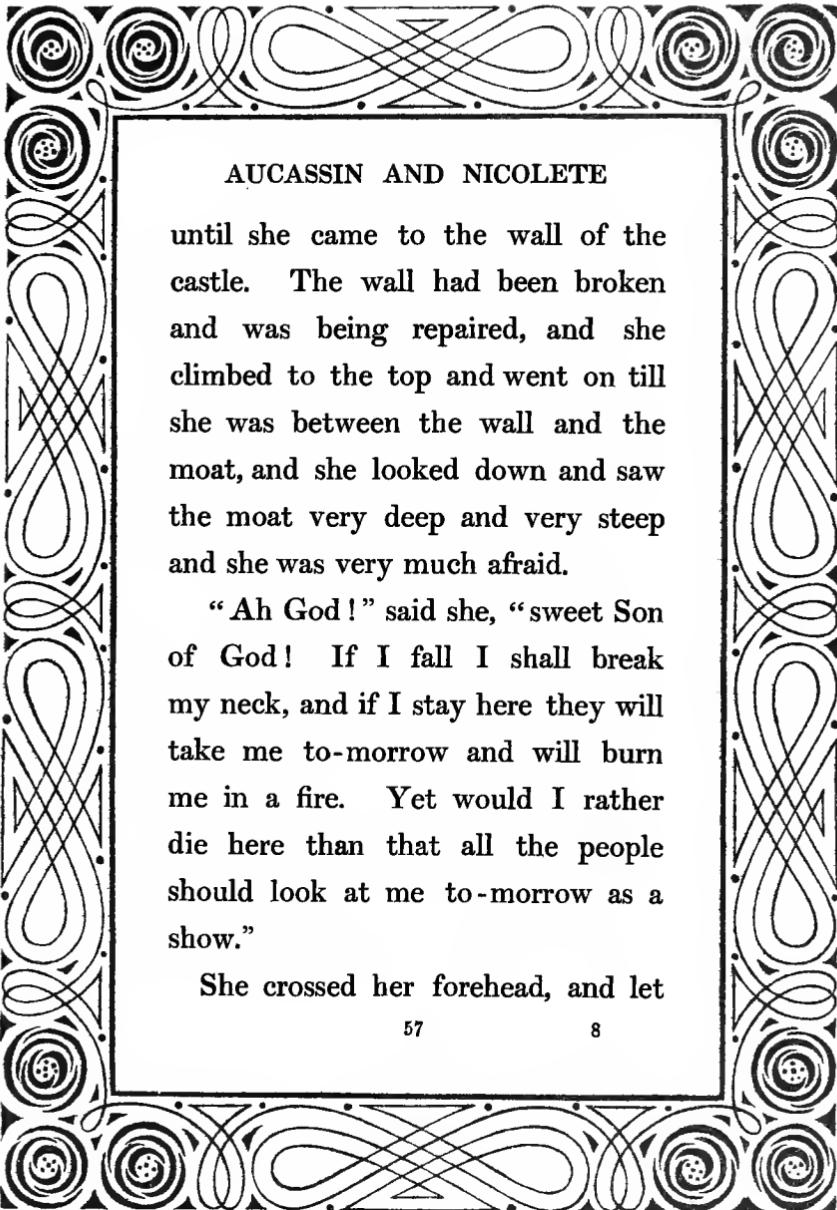
AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

16.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story :*

“Ha!” said Nicolete, “may the soul of your father and of your mother be in blessed rest, since so fairly and courteously have you told me this. If God please, I will surely guard myself from them, and God guard me!”

She wrapped herself in her mantle in the shadow of the pillar, until those men had passed beyond, and she said farewell to Aucassin, and went away



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until she came to the wall of the castle. The wall had been broken and was being repaired, and she climbed to the top and went on till she was between the wall and the moat, and she looked down and saw the moat very deep and very steep and she was very much afraid.

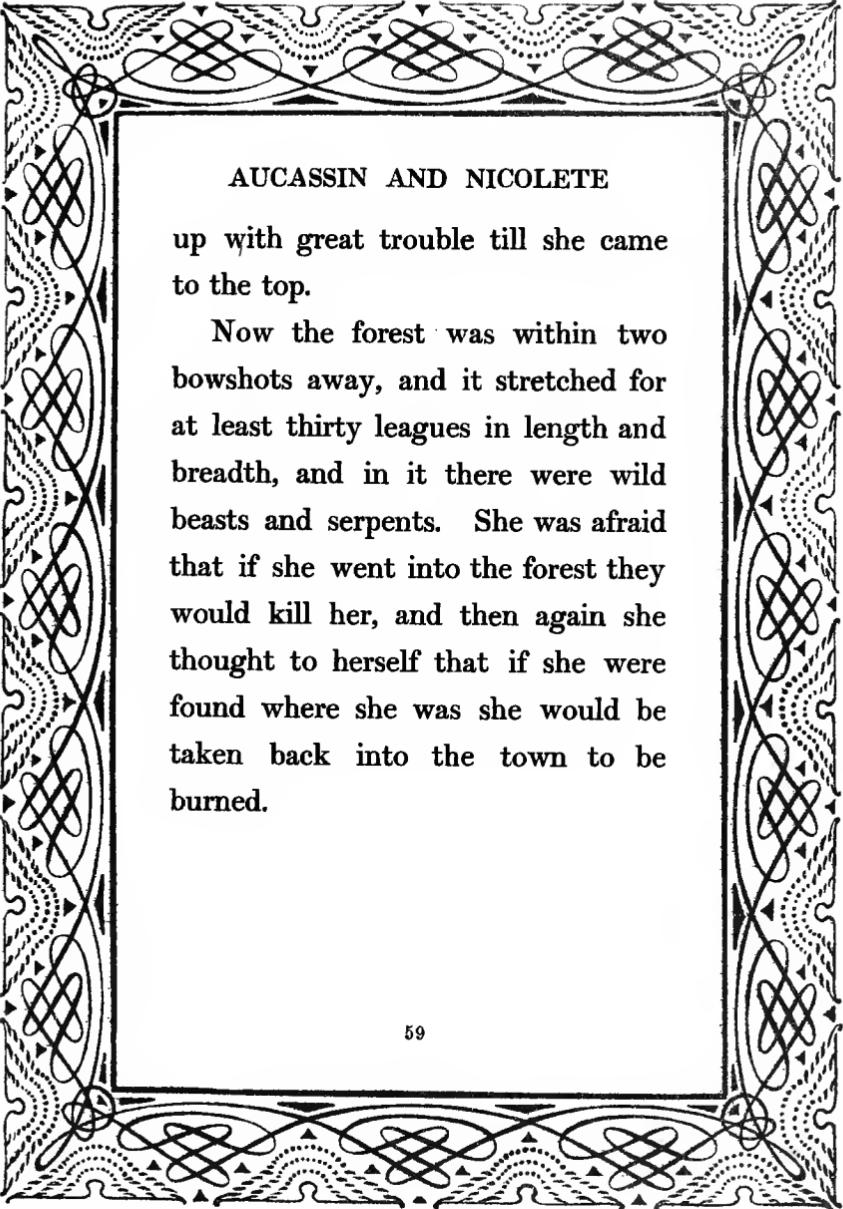
“Ah God!” said she, “sweet Son of God! If I fall I shall break my neck, and if I stay here they will take me to-morrow and will burn me in a fire. Yet would I rather die here than that all the people should look at me to-morrow as a show.”

She crossed her forehead, and let



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

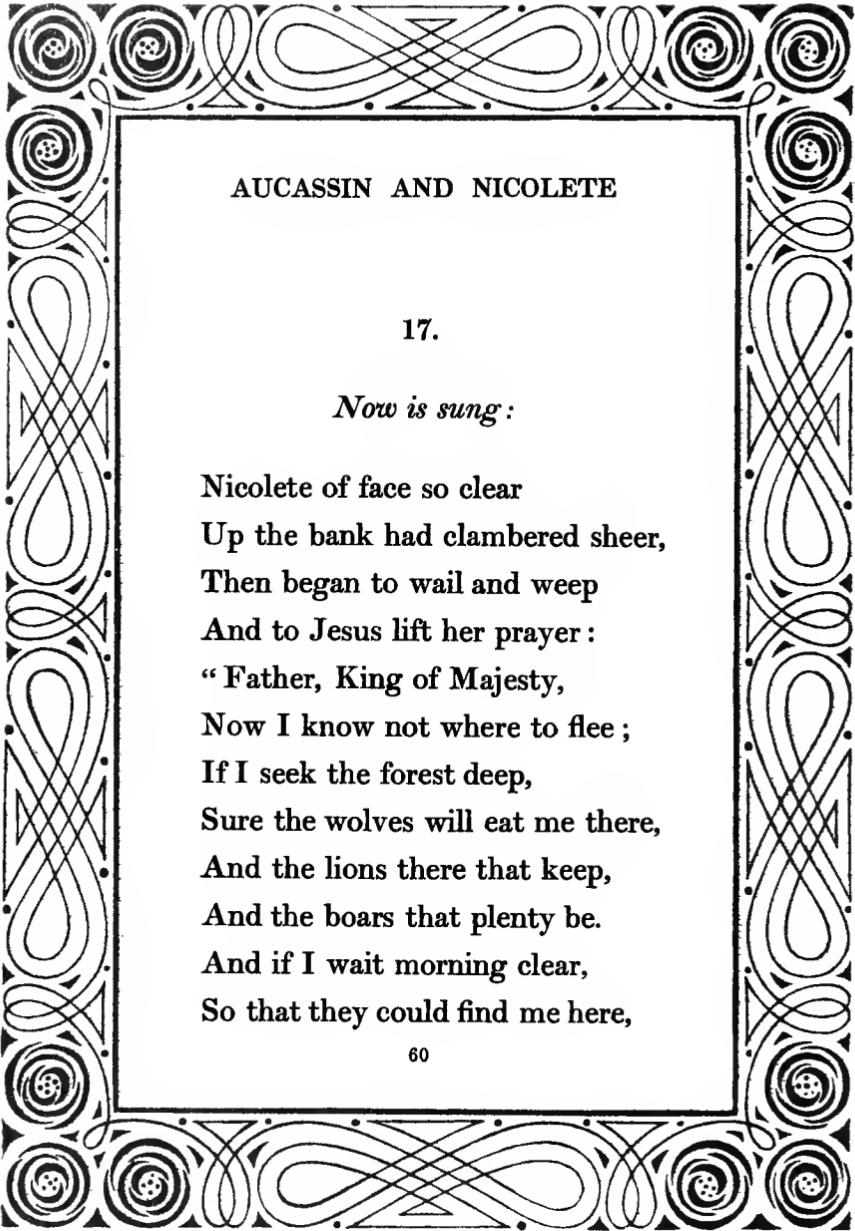
herself slide down the moat, and when she came to the bottom her fair feet and her fair hands, which had never known that they could be hurt, were bruised and torn, and the blood ran out from them in quite twelve places, and nevertheless she felt no ill nor pain because of the great fear she was in. And if she had been troubled how to get into the moat, she was much more troubled how to get out of it. She thought to herself that it would do no good at all to stay there, and found a sharpened stake which those within had thrown in the defence of the castle, and made steps one above another and climbed



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up with great trouble till she came to the top.

Now the forest was within two bowshots away, and it stretched for at least thirty leagues in length and breadth, and in it there were wild beasts and serpents. She was afraid that if she went into the forest they would kill her, and then again she thought to herself that if she were found where she was she would be taken back into the town to be burned.

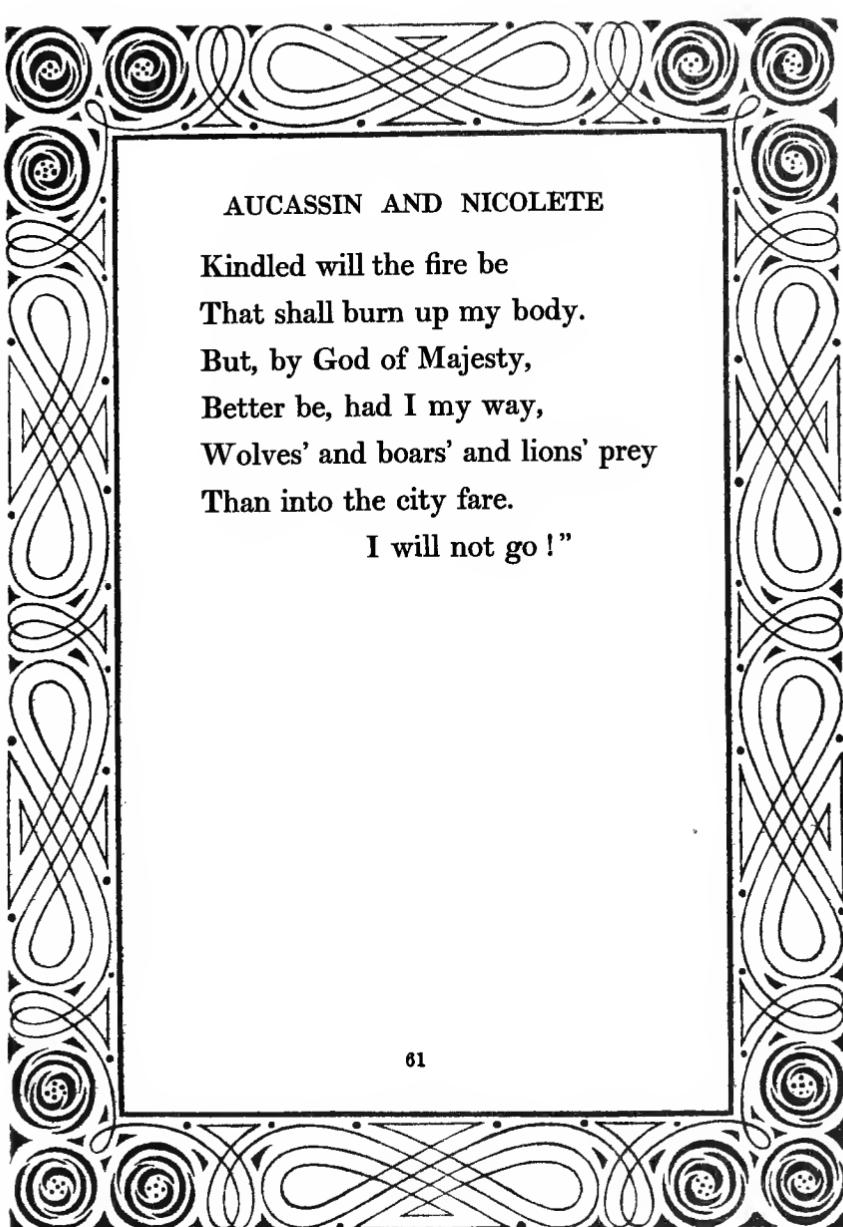


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17.

Now is sung :

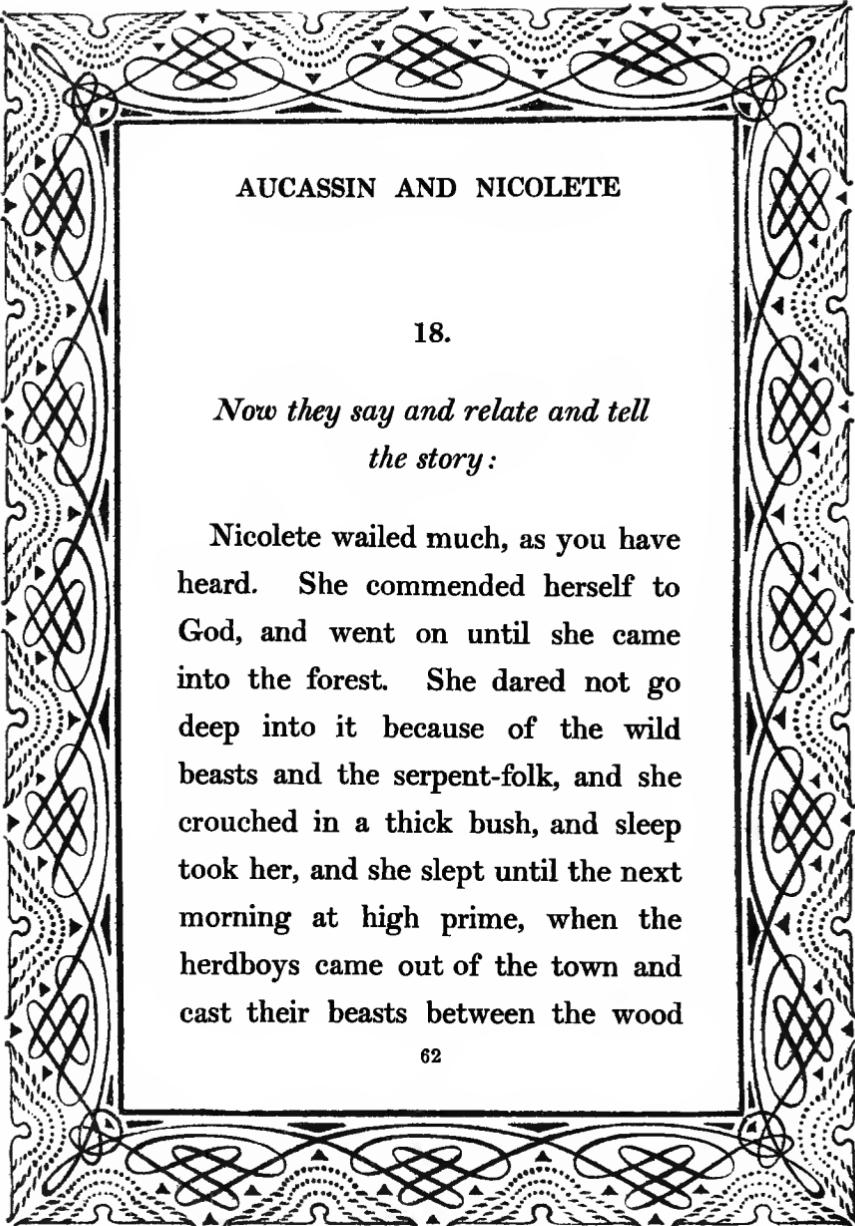
Nicolete of face so clear
Up the bank had clambered sheer,
Then began to wail and weep
And to Jesus lift her prayer :
“ Father, King of Majesty,
Now I know not where to flee ;
If I seek the forest deep,
Sure the wolves will eat me there,
And the lions there that keep,
And the boars that plenty be.
And if I wait morning clear,
So that they could find me here,



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Kindled will the fire be
That shall burn up my body.
But, by God of Majesty,
Better be, had I my way,
Wolves' and boars' and lions' prey
Than into the city fare.

I will not go !”



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

18.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story:*

Nicolete wailed much, as you have heard. She commended herself to God, and went on until she came into the forest. She dared not go deep into it because of the wild beasts and the serpent-folk, and she crouched in a thick bush, and sleep took her, and she slept until the next morning at high prime, when the herdboys came out of the town and cast their beasts between the wood



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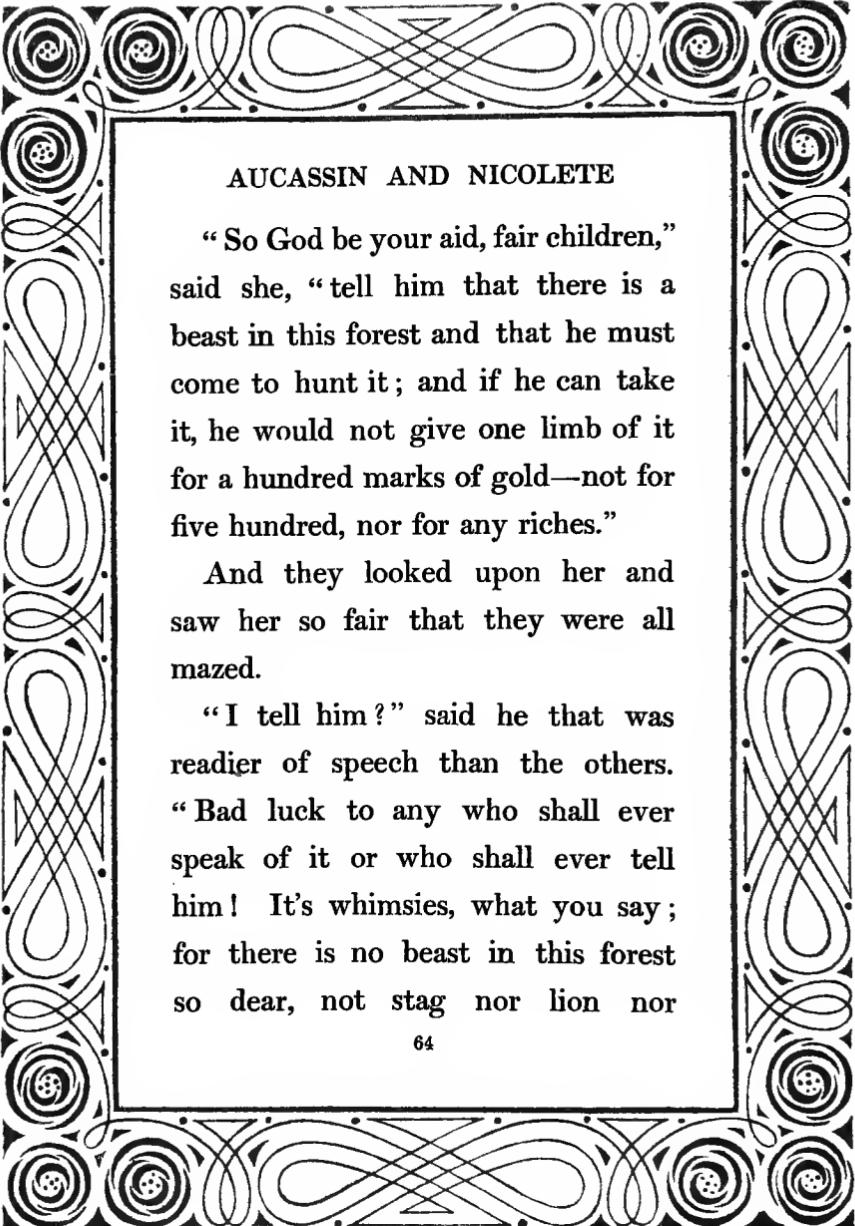
and the river, and themselves drew aside to a very fair spring that was at the end of the forest, and spread out a cloak and laid their bread on it. While they were eating, it was then that Nicolete awoke at the voices of the birds and of the herd-boys, and she sprang out on them.

“Fair children,” said she, “the Lord God be your aid !”

“God bless you,” said the one that was readier of speech than the others.

“Fair children,” said she, “do you know Aucassin the son of the Count Garin of Biaucaire ?”

“Yes, we know him well, do we.”



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“So God be your aid, fair children,” said she, “tell him that there is a beast in this forest and that he must come to hunt it; and if he can take it, he would not give one limb of it for a hundred marks of gold—not for five hundred, nor for any riches.”

And they looked upon her and saw her so fair that they were all mazed.

“I tell him?” said he that was readier of speech than the others. “Bad luck to any who shall ever speak of it or who shall ever tell him! It’s whimsies, what you say; for there is no beast in this forest so dear, not stag nor lion nor

““ Fair children,” said she, “do you know
Aucassin the son of the Count Garin of Biaucaire?”

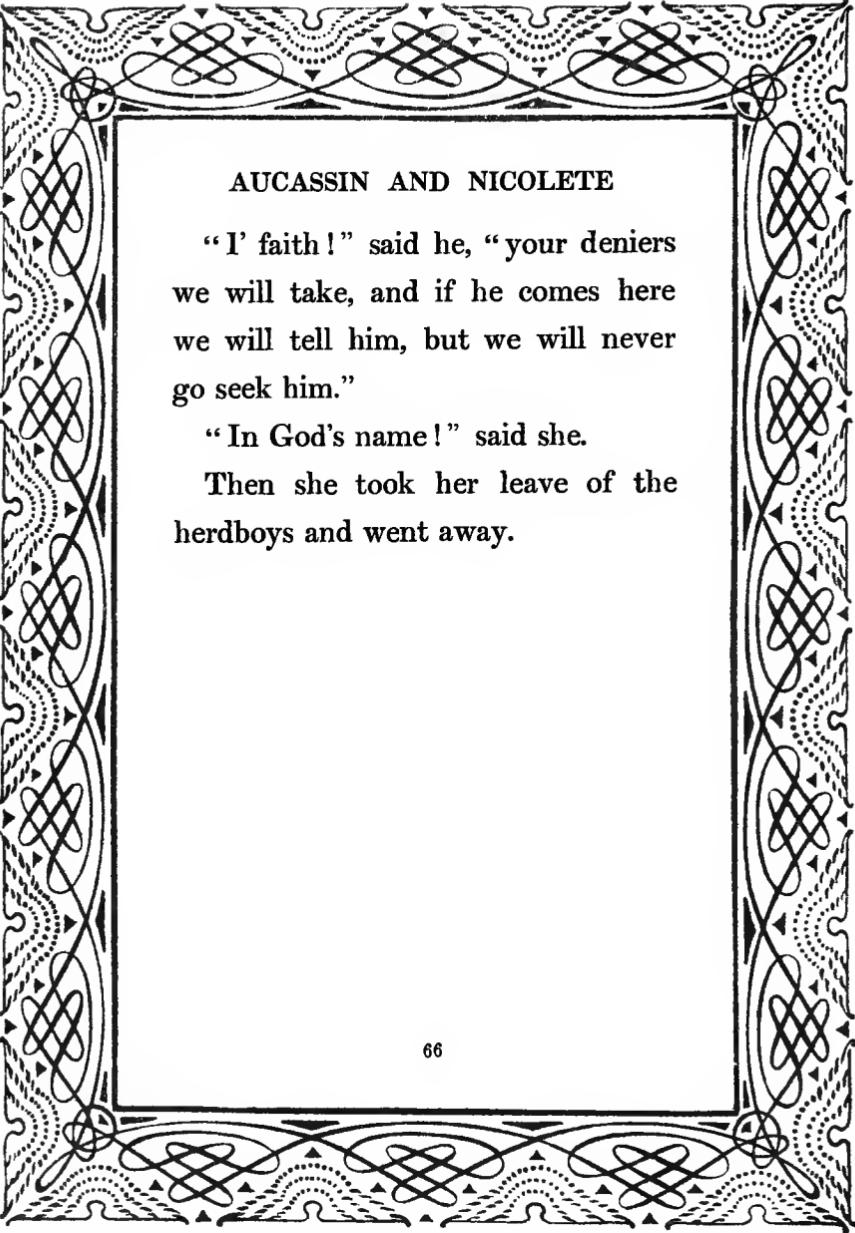




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boar, that one of its limbs is worth more than two deniers or three at the most, and you talk of so much riches! Black luck to any that believes your tale, or shall ever tell it him! You are a sprite, and we have no wish for your company, but take your way!"

"Ah, fair children," said she, "you will do so! The beast has such healing that Aucassins will be cured of his ill. And I have here five sous in my purse; take them and tell him. And within three days must he come to hunt, and if within three days he find it not, he will see it never and never will he be cured of his ill."

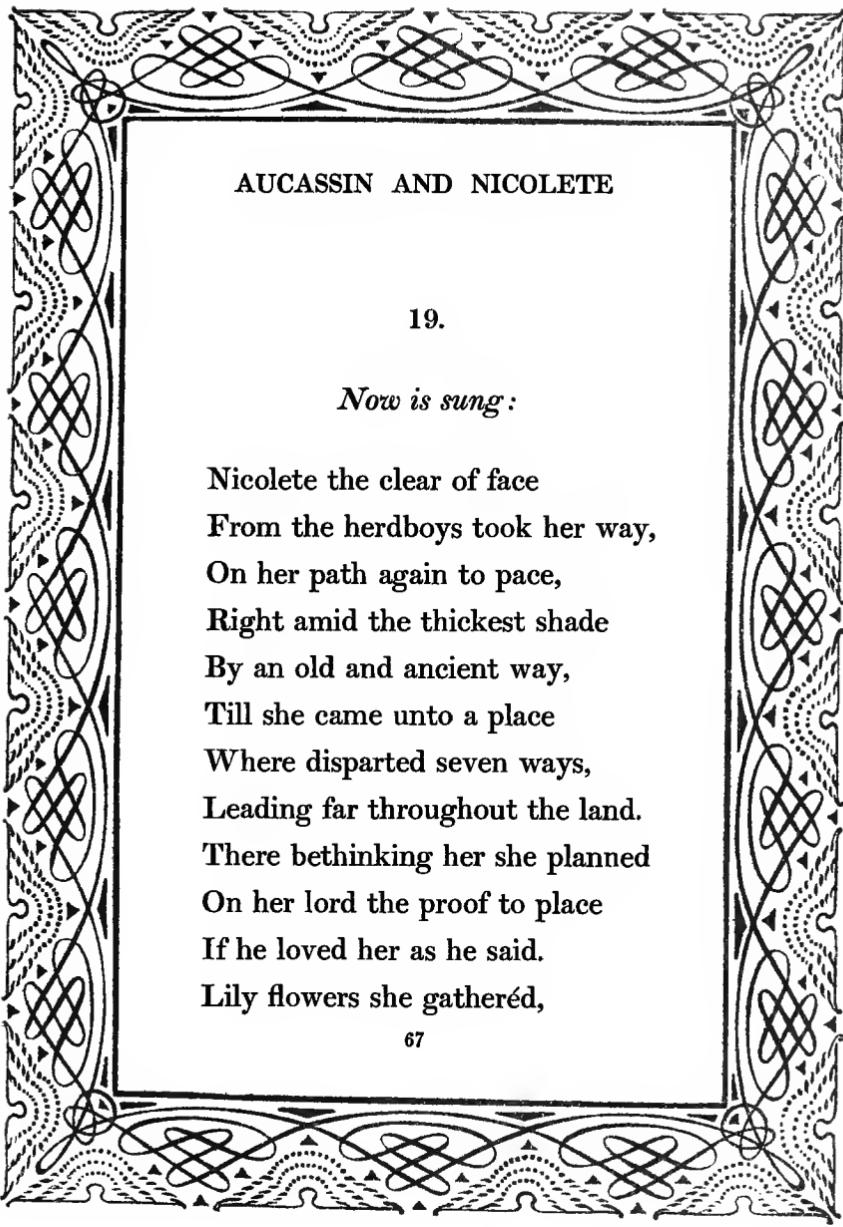


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“I’ faith!” said he, “your deniers we will take, and if he comes here we will tell him, but we will never go seek him.”

“In God’s name!” said she.

Then she took her leave of the herdboys and went away.

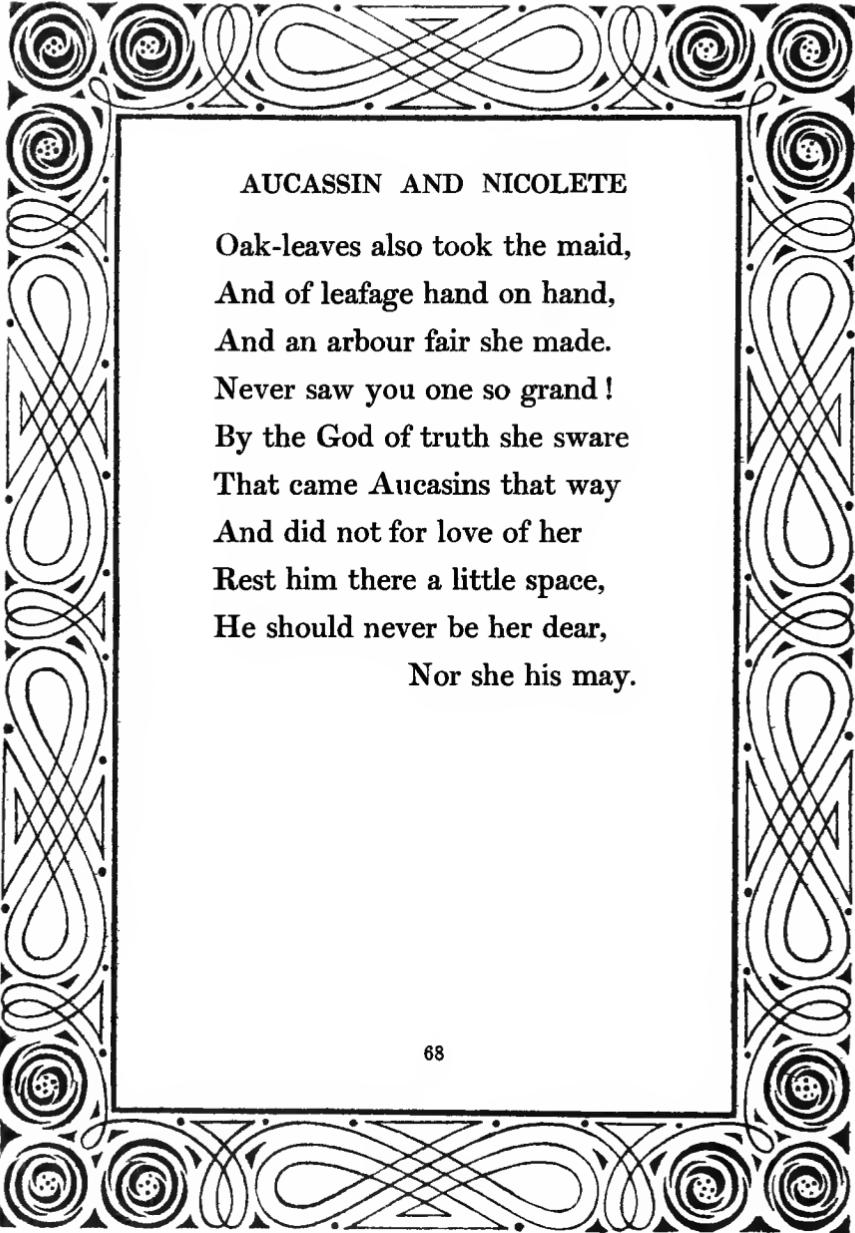


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19.

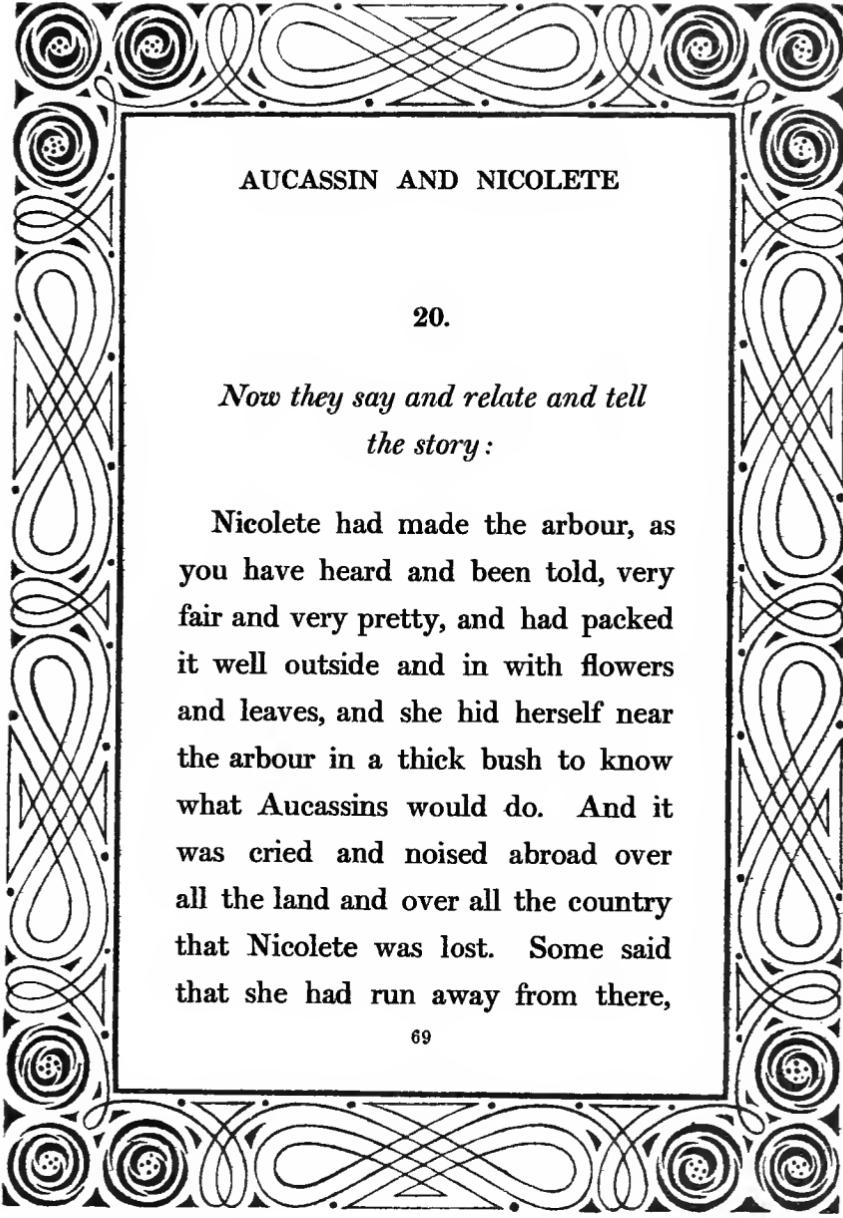
Now is sung :

Nicolete the clear of face
From the herdboys took her way,
On her path again to pace,
Right amid the thickest shade
By an old and ancient way,
Till she came unto a place
Where disparted seven ways,
Leading far throughout the land.
There bethinking her she planned
On her lord the proof to place
If he loved her as he said.
Lily flowers she gatheréd,



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Oak-leaves also took the maid,
And of leafage hand on hand,
And an arbour fair she made.
Never saw you one so grand !
By the God of truth she sware
That came Aucasins that way
And did not for love of her
Rest him there a little space,
He should never be her dear,
Nor she his may.



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

20.

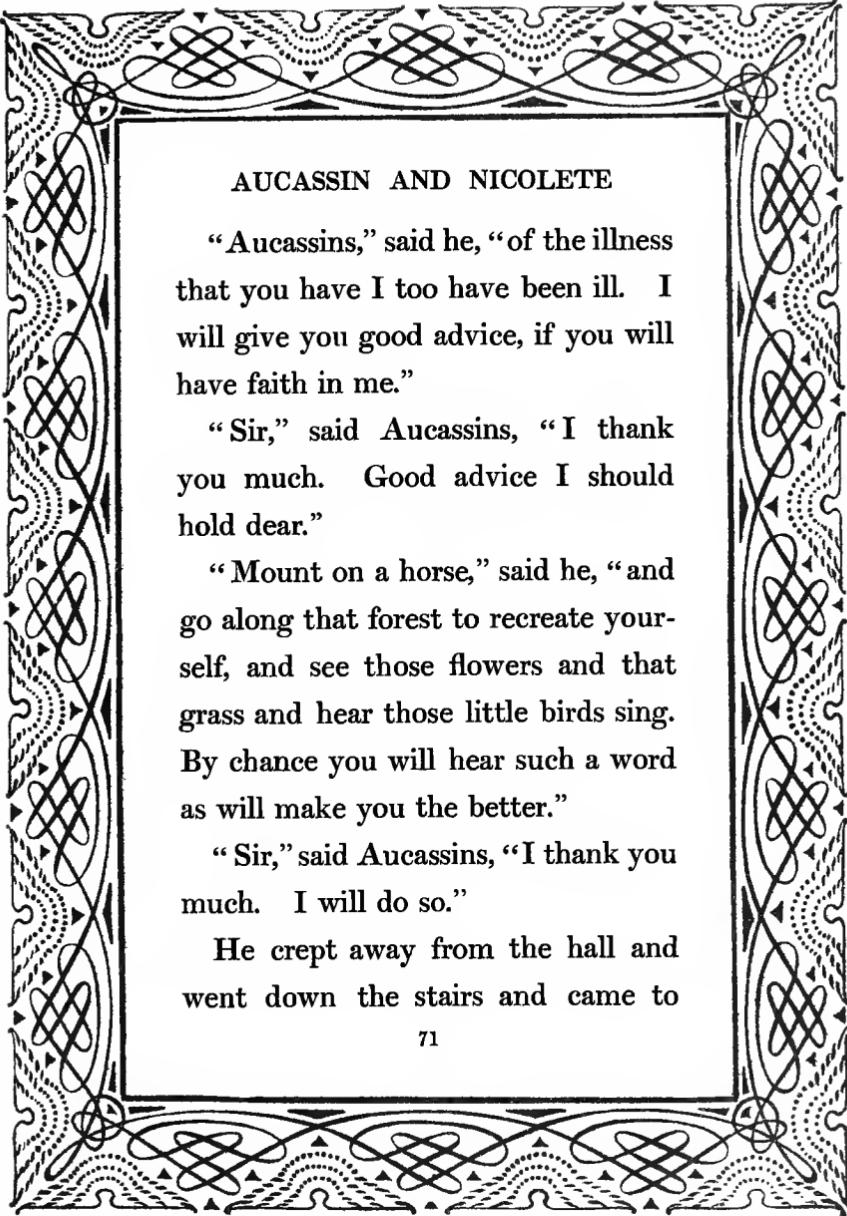
*Now they say and relate and tell
the story :*

Nicolete had made the arbour, as you have heard and been told, very fair and very pretty, and had packed it well outside and in with flowers and leaves, and she hid herself near the arbour in a thick bush to know what Aucassins would do. And it was cried and noised abroad over all the land and over all the country that Nicolete was lost. Some said that she had run away from there,



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and the rest said that the Count Garins had had her murdered. Whoever had joy of it, Aucassins indeed was not glad. And the Count Garins his father had him taken out of prison and summoned the knights of the land and the squires, and had a very rich feast made because he thought to comfort Aucassin his son. While the feast was at its height, then Aucassins was leaning on a gallery, all grieving and dejected. Whoever was mirthful, Aucassins had no stomach for it, for he saw there nothing of what he loved. A knight looked at him and came to him and accosted him.



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“Aucassins,” said he, “of the illness that you have I too have been ill. I will give you good advice, if you will have faith in me.”

“Sir,” said Aucassins, “I thank you much. Good advice I should hold dear.”

“Mount on a horse,” said he, “and go along that forest to recreate yourself, and see those flowers and that grass and hear those little birds sing. By chance you will hear such a word as will make you the better.”

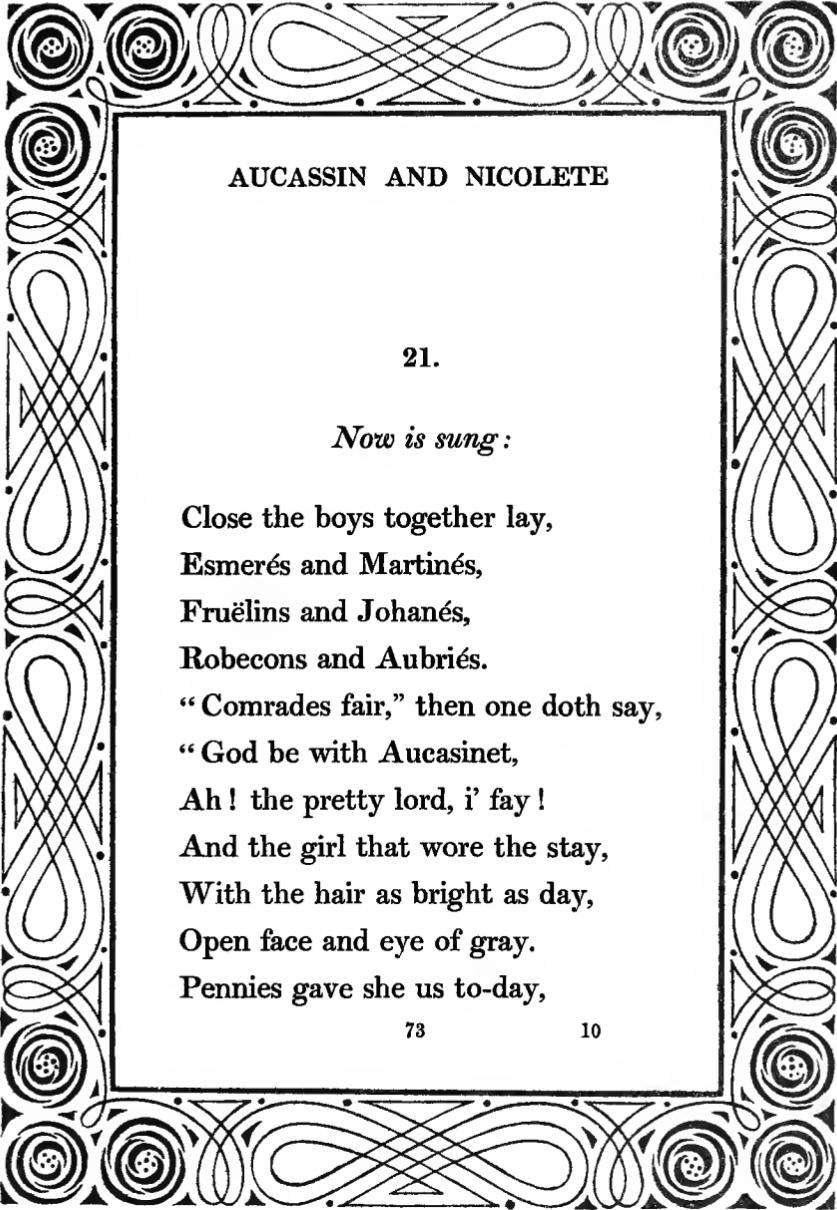
“Sir,” said Aucassins, “I thank you much. I will do so.”

He crept away from the hall and went down the stairs and came to



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the stable where his horses were. He had one saddled and bridled ; he put foot in the stirrup and mounted and went out of the castle, and went on until he came to the forest, and rode until he came to the spring and found the herdboys at the point of nones, and they had a cloak spread on the grass and were eating their bread and making much hearty merriment.

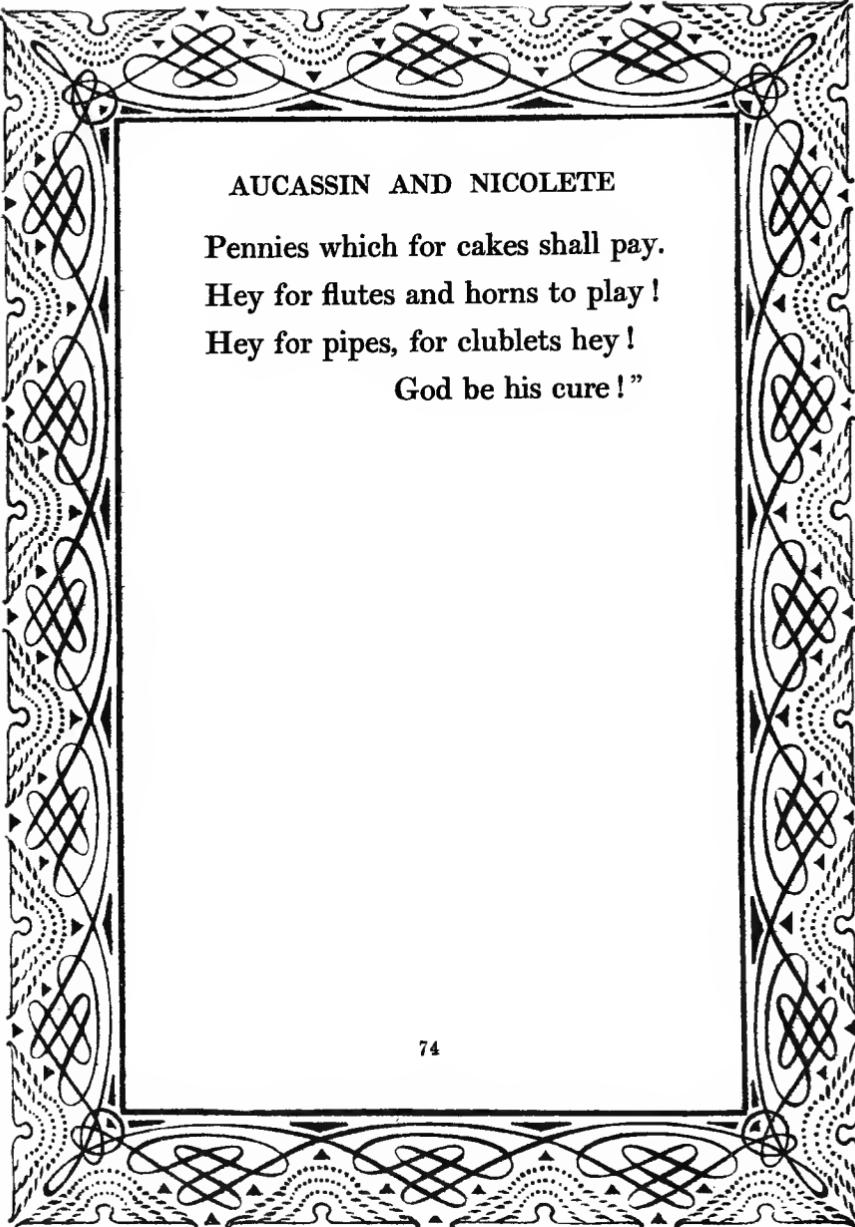


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21.

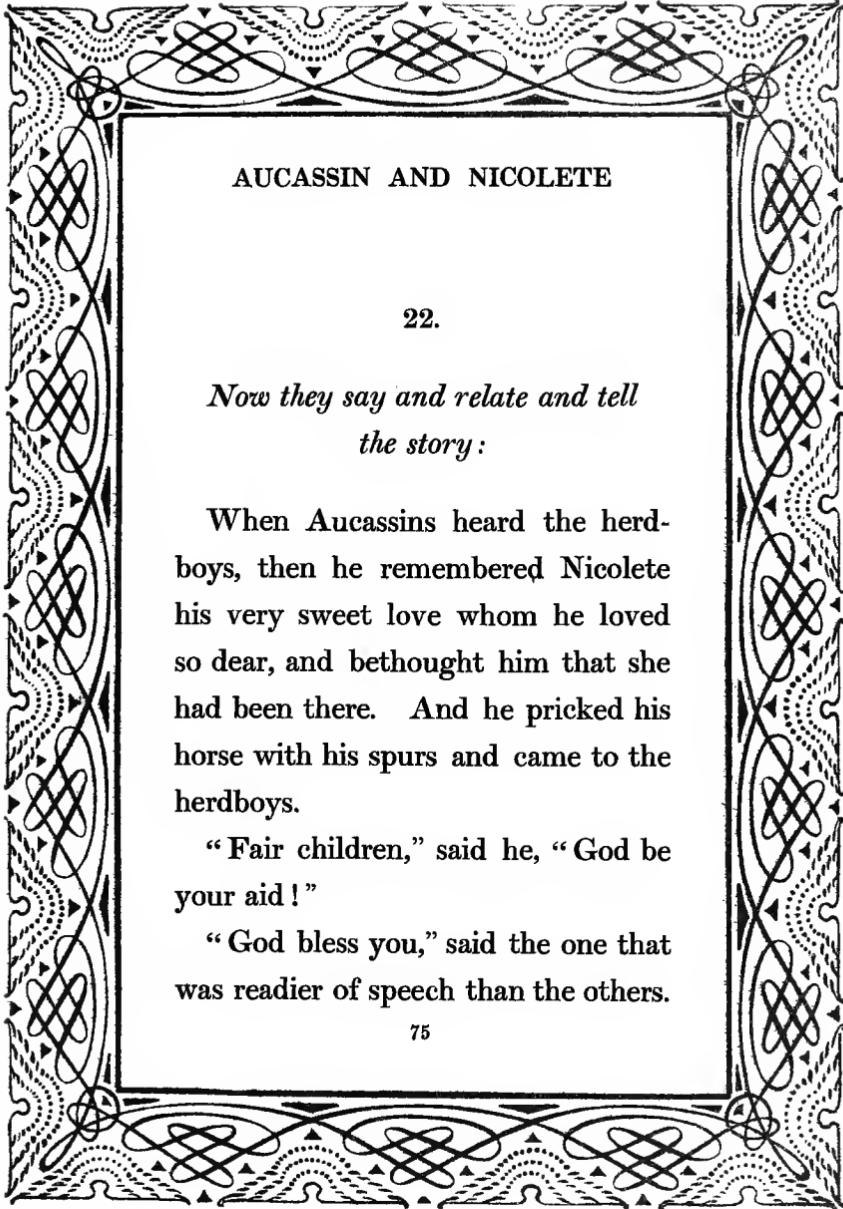
Now is sung :

Close the boys together lay,
Esmerés and Martinés,
Fruëlings and Johanés,
Robecons and Aubriés.
“Comrades fair,” then one doth say,
“God be with Aucasinet,
Ah ! the pretty lord, i’ fay !
And the girl that wore the stay,
With the hair as bright as day,
Open face and eye of gray.
Pennies gave she us to-day,



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

Pennies which for cakes shall pay.
Hey for flutes and horns to play !
Hey for pipes, for clublets hey !
God be his cure !”



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

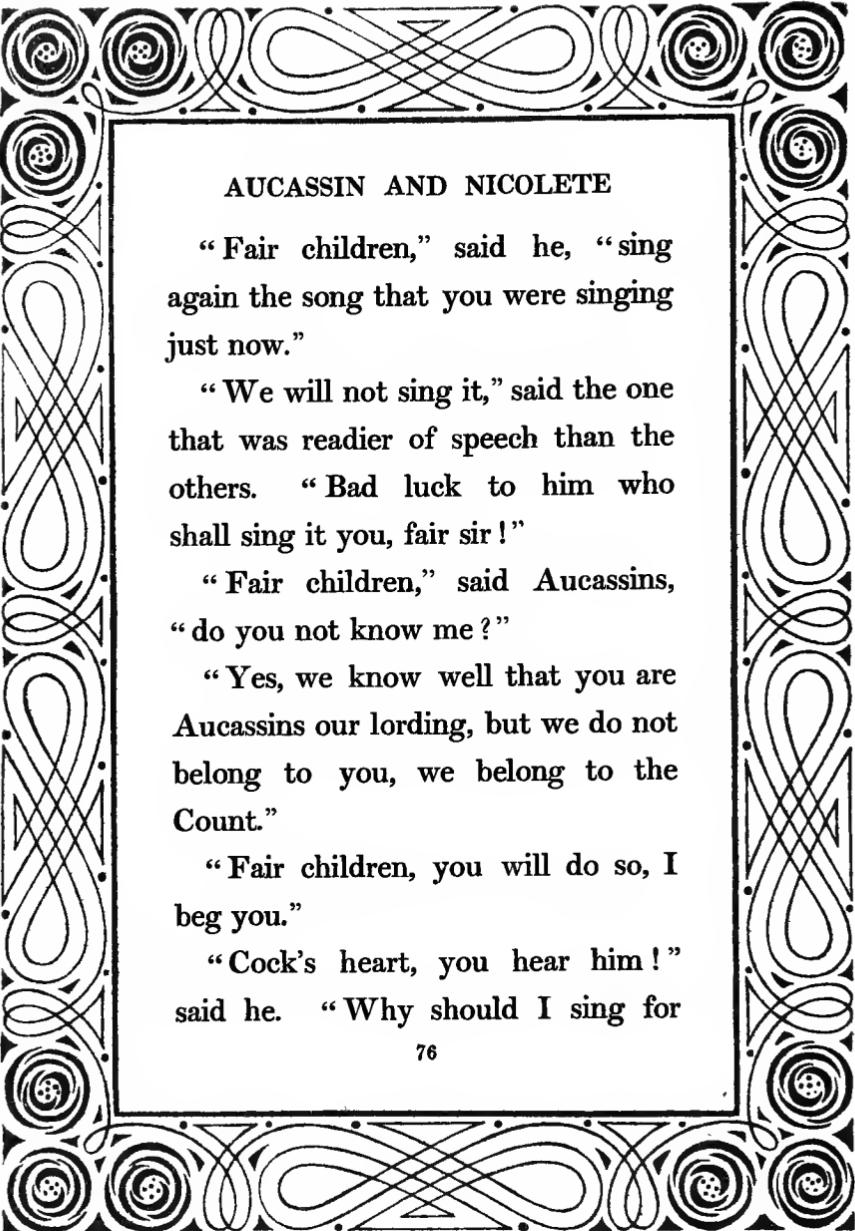
22.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story :*

When Aucassins heard the herd-boys, then he remembered Nicolete his very sweet love whom he loved so dear, and bethought him that she had been there. And he pricked his horse with his spurs and came to the herdboys.

“Fair children,” said he, “God be your aid !”

“God bless you,” said the one that was readier of speech than the others.



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“Fair children,” said he, “sing again the song that you were singing just now.”

“We will not sing it,” said the one that was readier of speech than the others. “Bad luck to him who shall sing it you, fair sir!”

“Fair children,” said Aucassins, “do you not know me?”

“Yes, we know well that you are Aucassins our lording, but we do not belong to you, we belong to the Count.”

“Fair children, you will do so, I beg you.”

“Cock’s heart, you hear him!” said he. “Why should I sing for

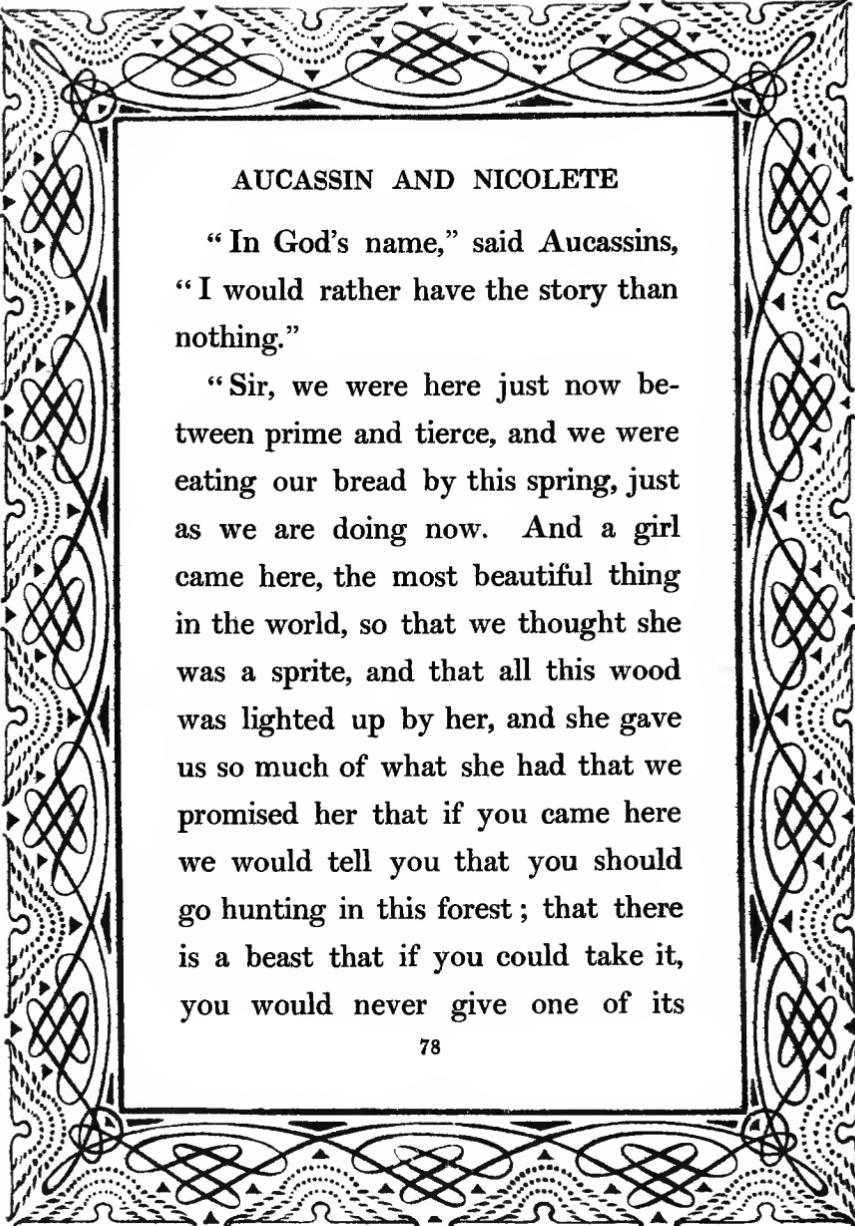


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you, if it does not suit me? For there is no man so rich in this country, except Count Garin himself, if he found my cows or my sheep in his pasture or in his wheat would ever be so bold, at pain of having his eyes put out, as to dare to drive them out of it. And why should I sing for you, if it does not suit me?"

"So God help you, fair children, you will do it! And take ten sous that I have here in my purse."

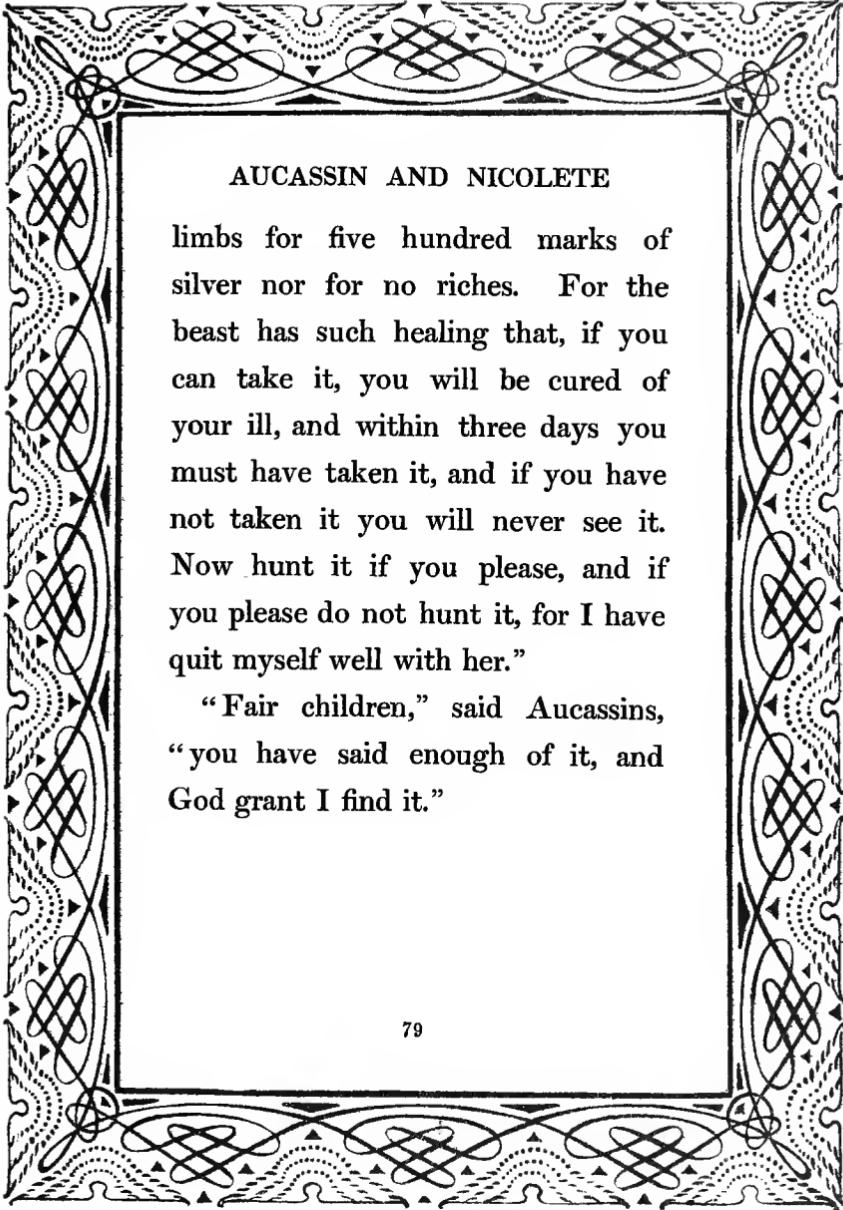
"Sir, the deniers we will take, but I will never sing for you, for I have sworn I will not. But I will tell you the story, if you will."



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“In God’s name,” said Aucassins,
“I would rather have the story than
nothing.”

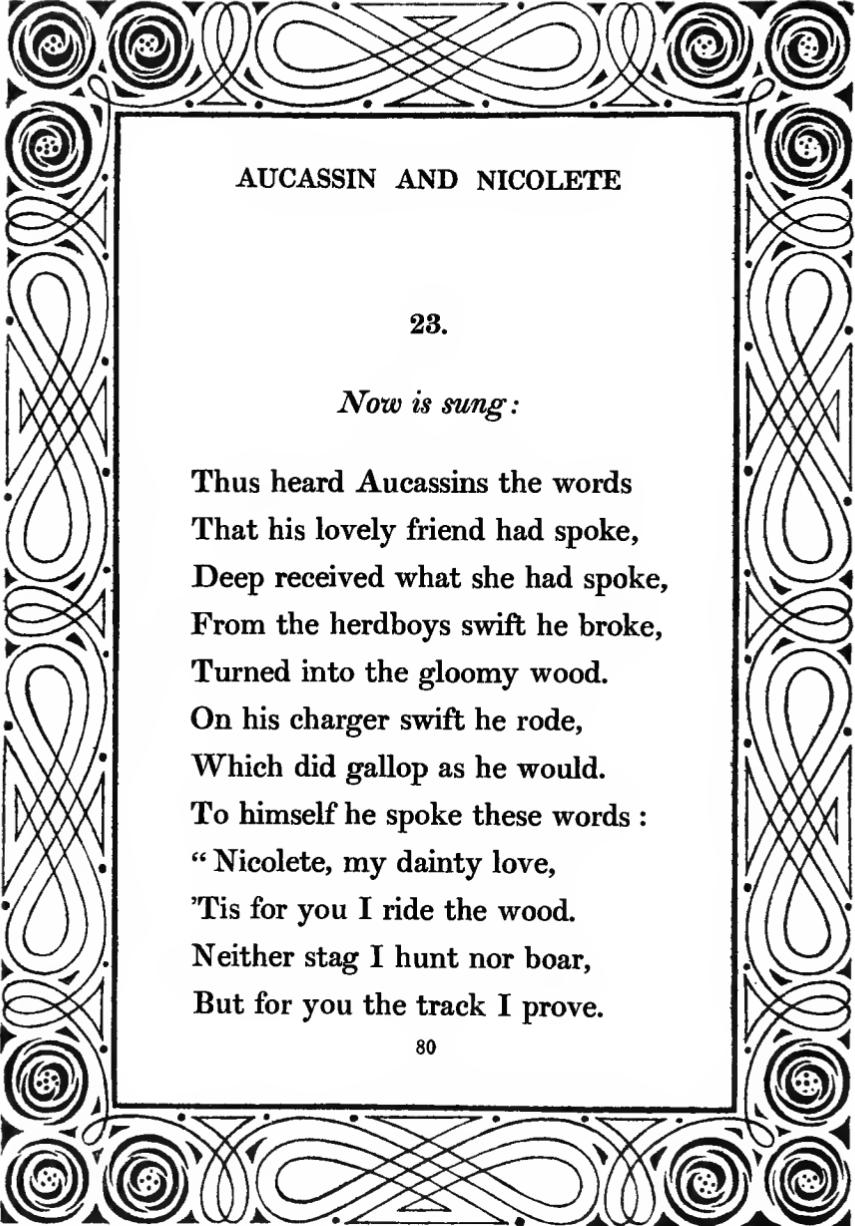
“Sir, we were here just now between prime and tierce, and we were eating our bread by this spring, just as we are doing now. And a girl came here, the most beautiful thing in the world, so that we thought she was a sprite, and that all this wood was lighted up by her, and she gave us so much of what she had that we promised her that if you came here we would tell you that you should go hunting in this forest ; that there is a beast that if you could take it, you would never give one of its



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limbs for five hundred marks of silver nor for no riches. For the beast has such healing that, if you can take it, you will be cured of your ill, and within three days you must have taken it, and if you have not taken it you will never see it. Now hunt it if you please, and if you please do not hunt it, for I have quit myself well with her."

"Fair children," said Aucassins, "you have said enough of it, and God grant I find it."

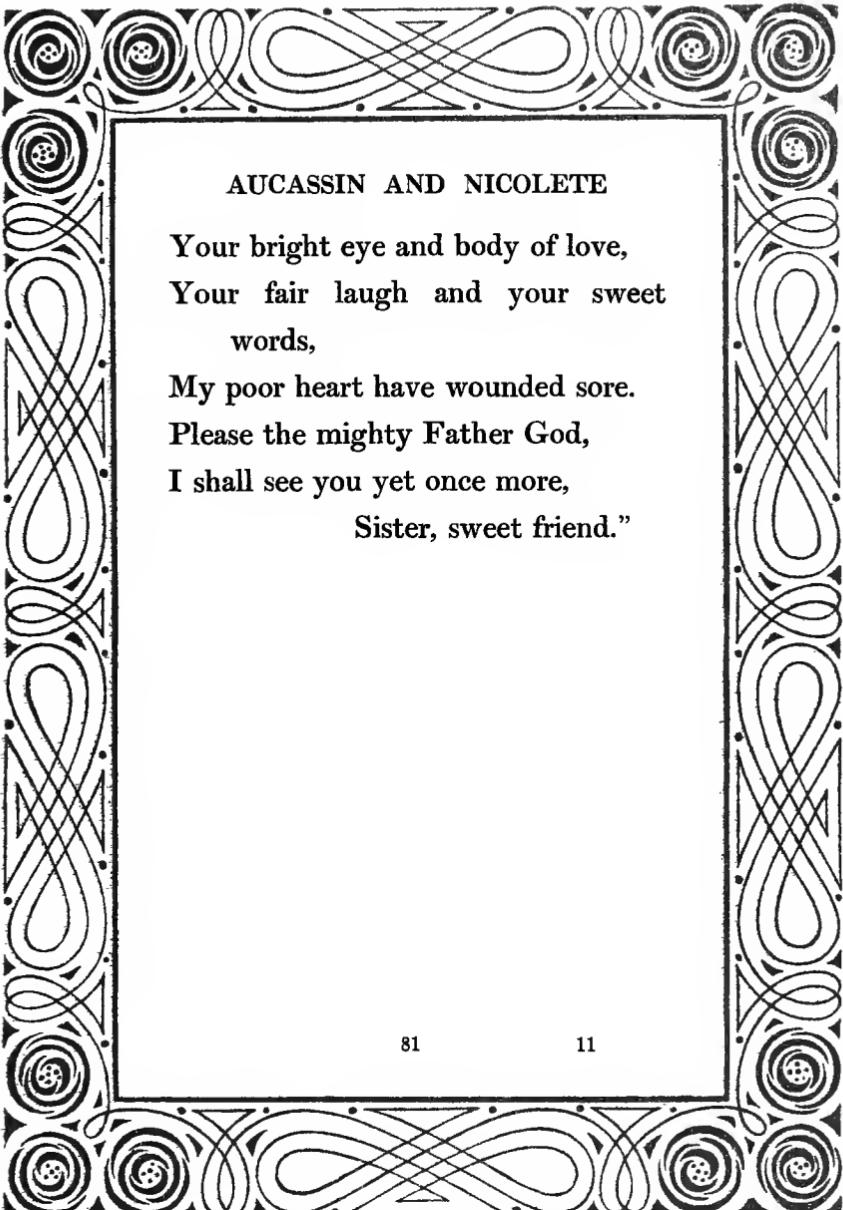


AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

23.

Now is sung :

Thus heard Aucassins the words
That his lovely friend had spoke,
Deep received what she had spoke,
From the herdboys swift he broke,
Turned into the gloomy wood.
On his charger swift he rode,
Which did gallop as he would.
To himself he spoke these words :
“ Nicolete, my dainty love,
’Tis for you I ride the wood.
Neither stag I hunt nor boar,
But for you the track I prove.



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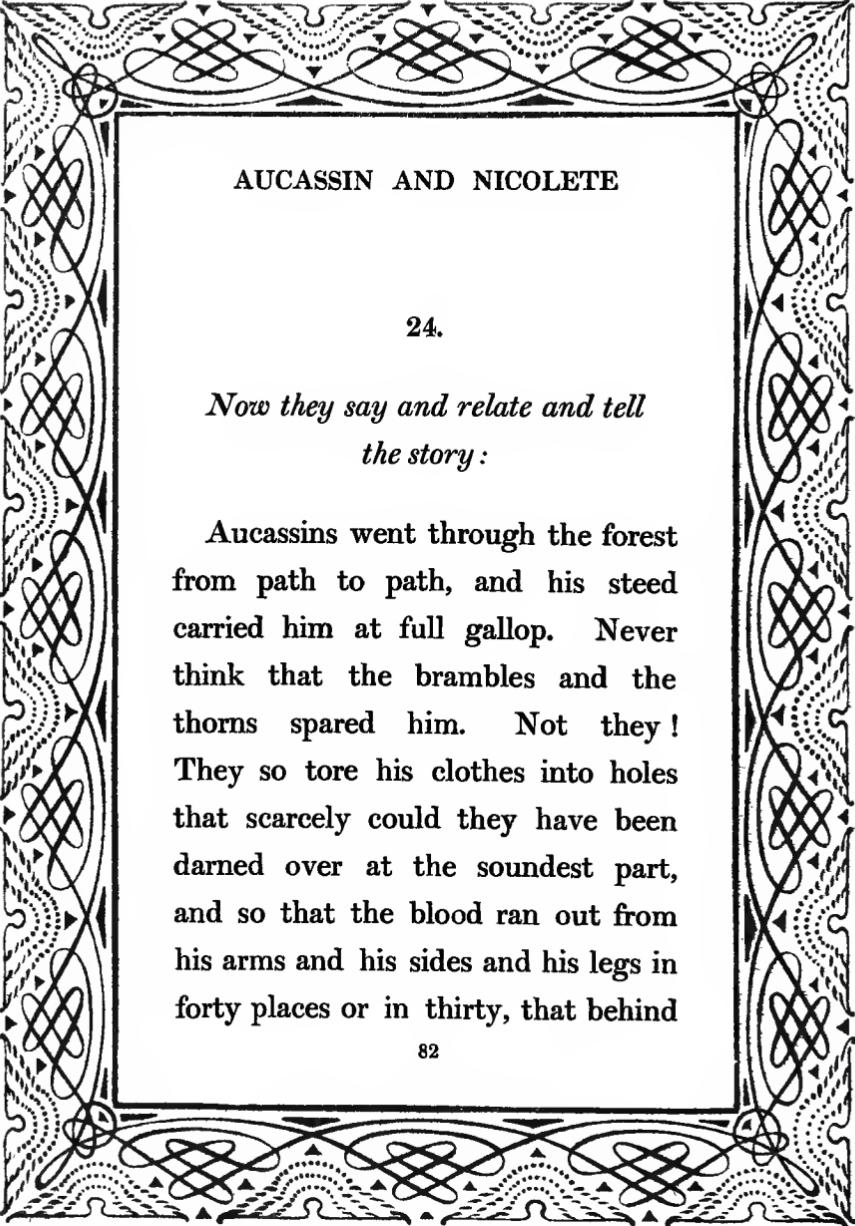
Your bright eye and body of love,
Your fair laugh and your sweet
words,

My poor heart have wounded sore.

Please the mighty Father God,

I shall see you yet once more,

Sister, sweet friend."



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24.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story :*

Aucassins went through the forest from path to path, and his steed carried him at full gallop. Never think that the brambles and the thorns spared him. Not they ! They so tore his clothes into holes that scarcely could they have been darned over at the soundest part, and so that the blood ran out from his arms and his sides and his legs in forty places or in thirty, that behind



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the boy one could follow the trail of the blood that fell on the grass. But he thought so on Nicolette his sweet love that he felt neither hurt nor pain, and went all day through the midst of the forest in such a way that he never heard news of her. And when he saw that the evening was drawing near, he began to weep because he did not find her.

It was along an old grassy way he was riding when he looked before him in the middle of the way and saw a young man who was like what I will tell you. He was tall and marvellous and ugly and hideous. He had a great pow blacker than a

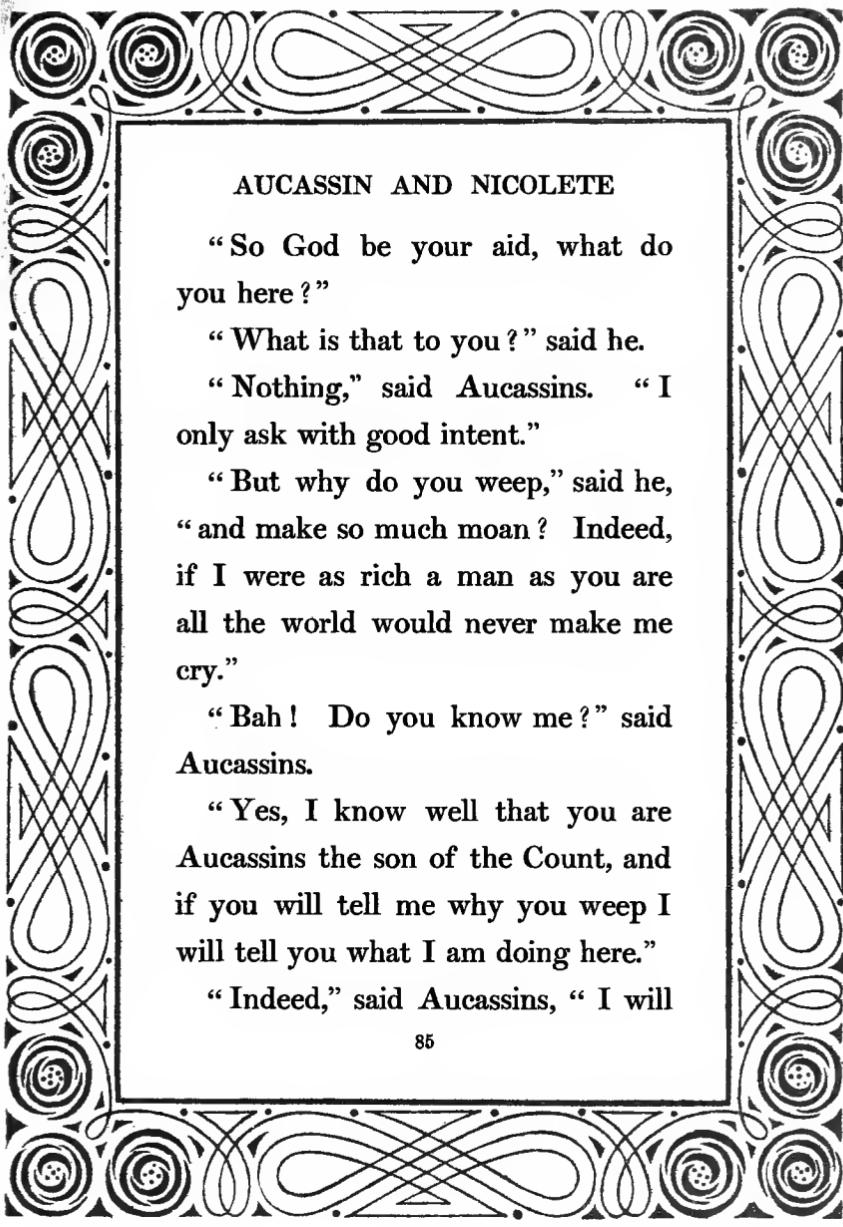


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lump of charcoal, and had more than a full palm's breadth between his two eyes, and had two great cheeks and a very large flat nose and two great wide nostrils and two great lips redder than a live coal, and some great yellow ugly teeth, and he was shod with some leggings and shoes of oxhide laced with strips of lime-tree bark to above the knee, and he was muffled up in a cloak with two wrong sides and was leaning on a great club. Aucassins threw himself towards him and was full of fear when he looked on him.

“Fair brother, God be your aid!”

“God bless you,” said he.



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

“So God be your aid, what do you here?”

“What is that to you?” said he.

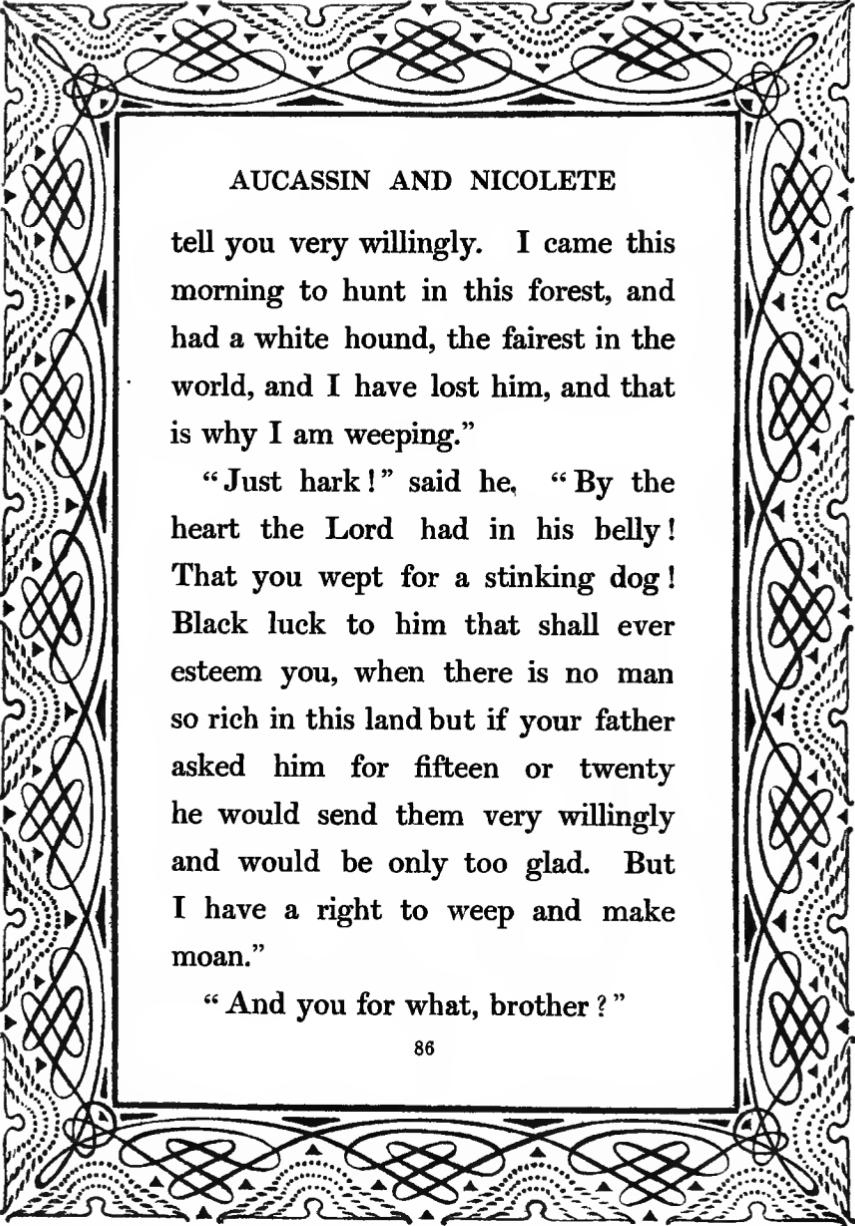
“Nothing,” said Aucassins. “I only ask with good intent.”

“But why do you weep,” said he, “and make so much moan? Indeed, if I were as rich a man as you are all the world would never make me cry.”

“Bah! Do you know me?” said Aucassins.

“Yes, I know well that you are Aucassins the son of the Count, and if you will tell me why you weep I will tell you what I am doing here.”

“Indeed,” said Aucassins, “I will



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tell you very willingly. I came this morning to hunt in this forest, and had a white hound, the fairest in the world, and I have lost him, and that is why I am weeping."

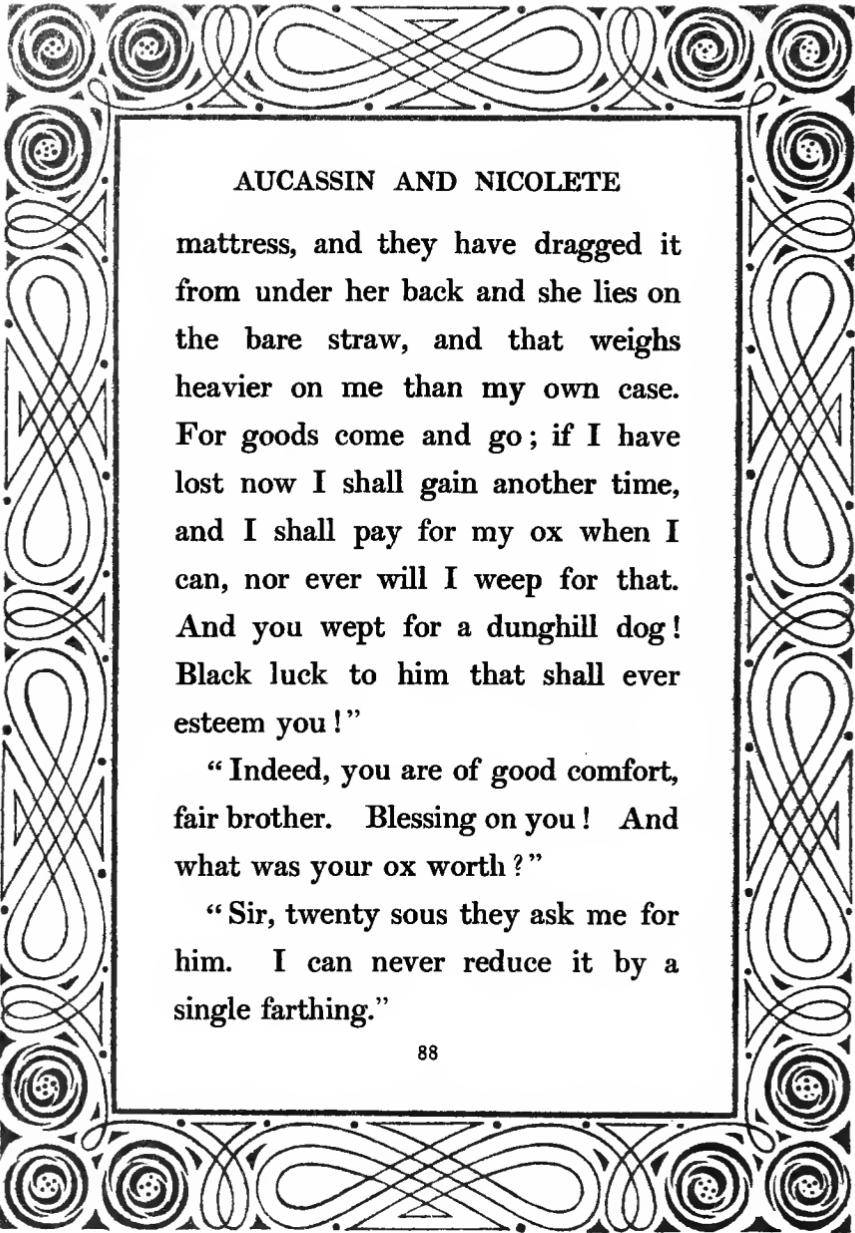
"Just hark!" said he, "By the heart the Lord had in his belly! That you wept for a stinking dog! Black luck to him that shall ever esteem you, when there is no man so rich in this land but if your father asked him for fifteen or twenty he would send them very willingly and would be only too glad. But I have a right to weep and make moan."

"And you for what, brother?"



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“Sir, I will tell you what for. I was hired to a rich farmer and drove his plough; four oxen there were. It is three days now since there happened to me a great misfortune, that I lost the best of my oxen, Roget, the best of my plough, and I am in search of him. And I have neither eaten nor drunk these three days past, and I dare not go to the town; they would put me in prison, because I have nothing to pay for him with. Of all the goods in the world I have nothing of more value than you see on the body of me. A poor mother had I, and she had nothing of more value than an old



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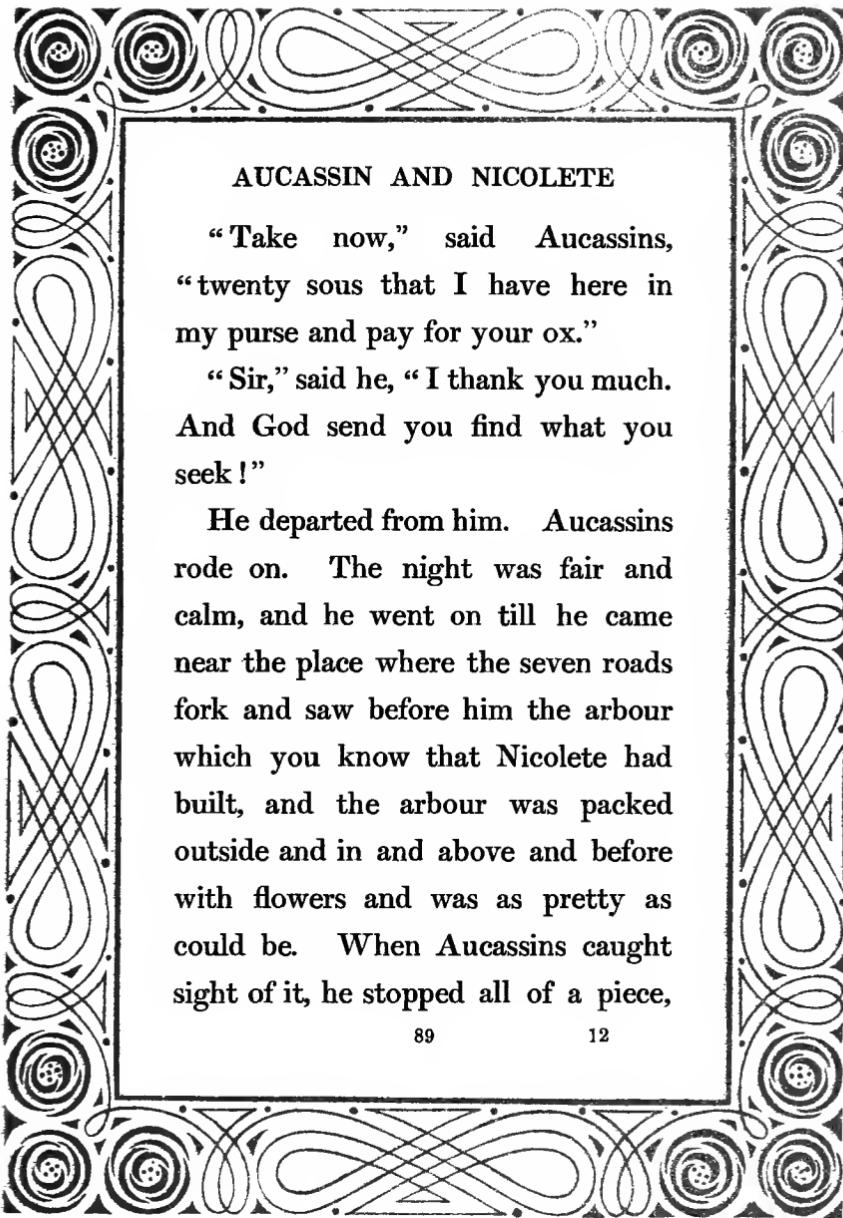
mattress, and they have dragged it from under her back and she lies on the bare straw, and that weighs heavier on me than my own case. For goods come and go ; if I have lost now I shall gain another time, and I shall pay for my ox when I can, nor ever will I weep for that. And you wept for a dunghill dog ! Black luck to him that shall ever esteem you ! ”

“ Indeed, you are of good comfort, fair brother. Blessing on you ! And what was your ox worth ? ”

“ Sir, twenty sous they ask me for him. I can never reduce it by a single farthing. ”

‘It was along an old grassy way he was riding when he looked before him in the middle of the way and saw a young man. . . . He was tall and marvellous and ugly and hideous.’





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“Take now,” said Aucassins,
“twenty sous that I have here in
my purse and pay for your ox.”

“Sir,” said he, “I thank you much.
And God send you find what you
seek !”

He departed from him. Aucassins
rode on. The night was fair and
calm, and he went on till he came
near the place where the seven roads
fork and saw before him the harbour
which you know that Nicolete had
built, and the harbour was packed
outside and in and above and before
with flowers and was as pretty as
could be. When Aucassins caught
sight of it, he stopped all of a piece,

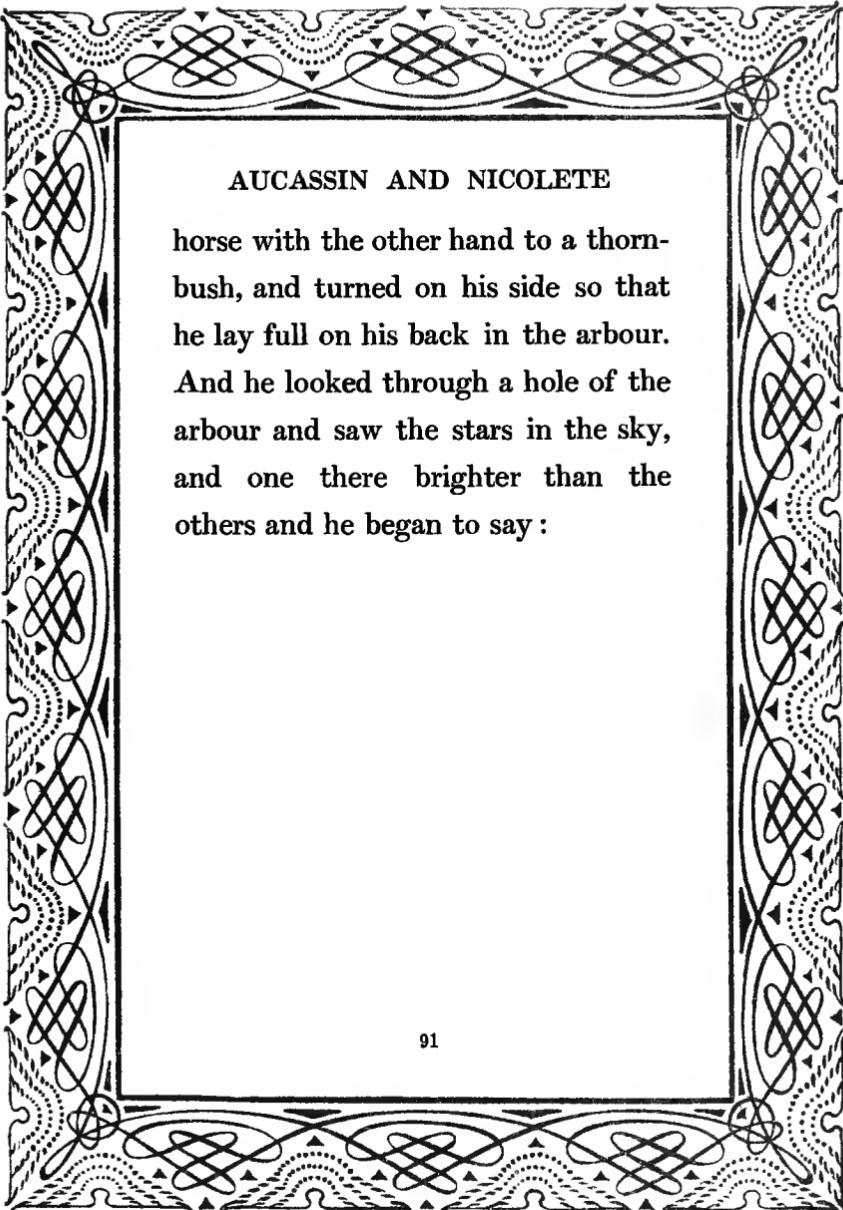


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and the rays of the moon struck into it.

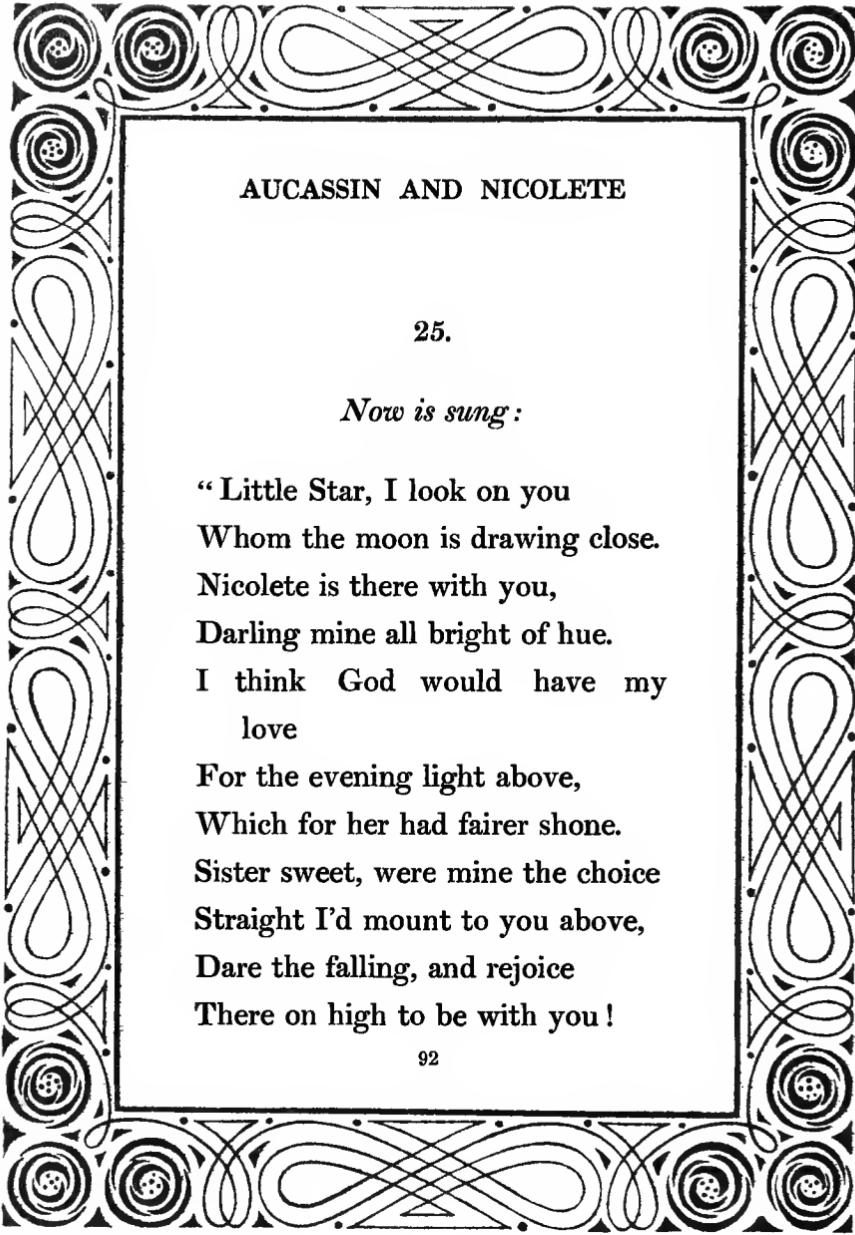
“O God!” said Aucassins, “here was Nicolete, my sweet love, and this she made with her beautiful hands. For the sweetness of her and for her love I will dismount now here and will rest here but this night.”

He took his foot out of the stirrup to dismount, and the horse was large and high. He thought so much on Nicolete, his very sweet love, that he fell so hard on a stone that his shoulder flew from its place. He felt himself much hurt, but he made all the effort he could and tied his



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horse with the other hand to a thorn-bush, and turned on his side so that he lay full on his back in the arbour. And he looked through a hole of the arbour and saw the stars in the sky, and one there brighter than the others and he began to say :

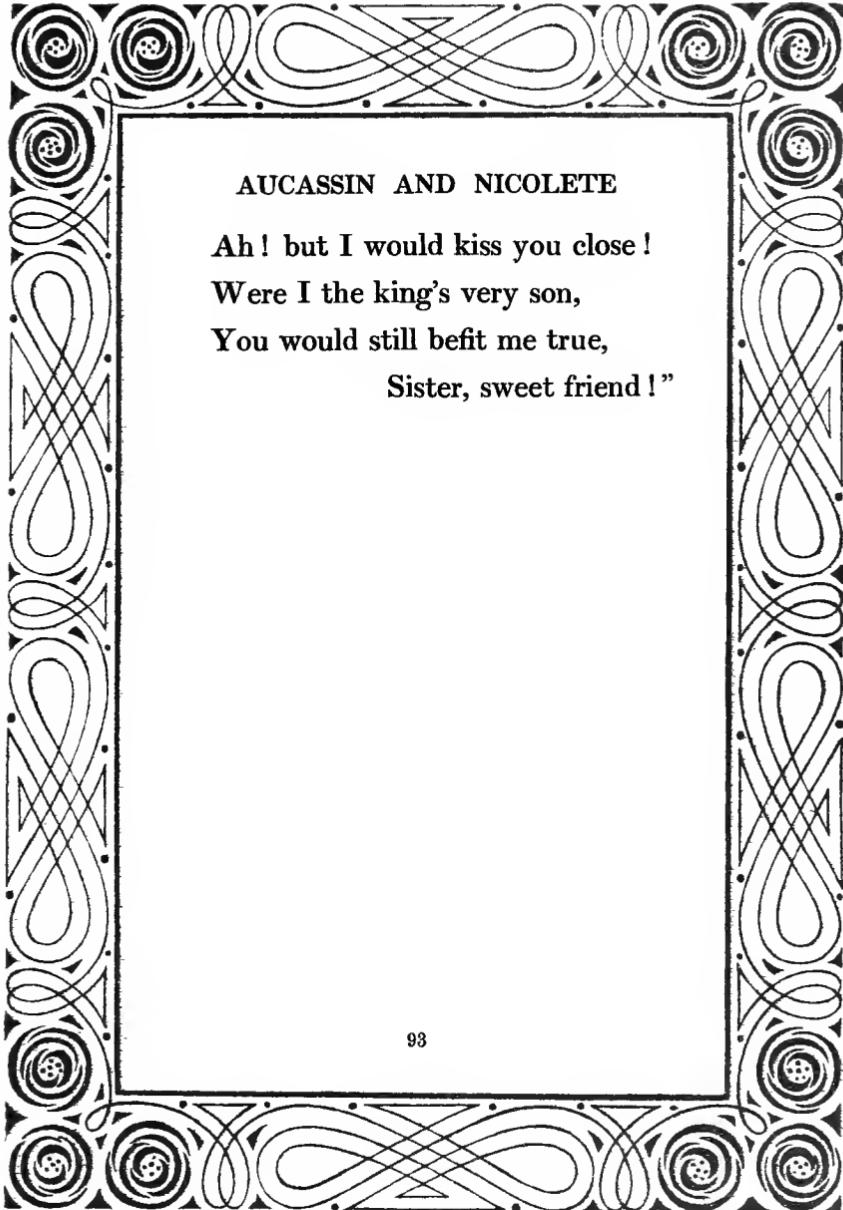


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25.

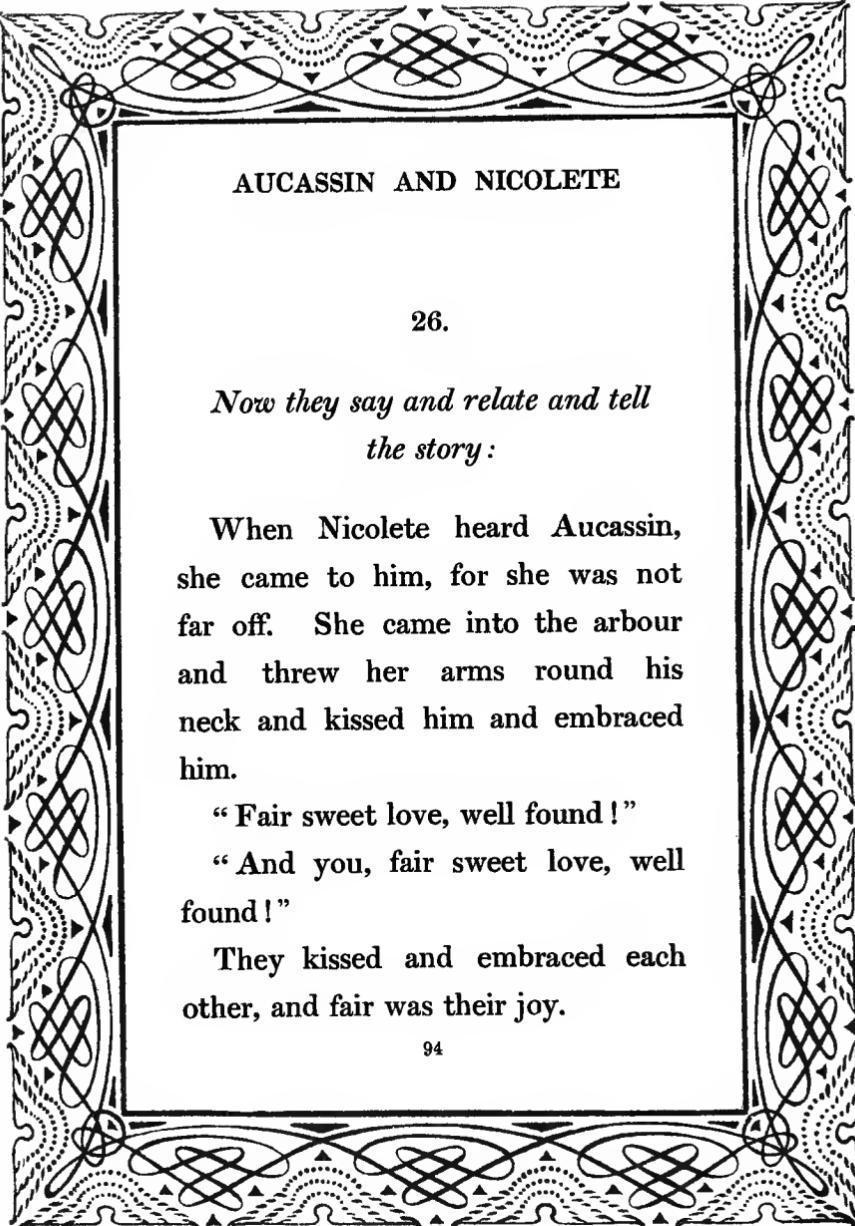
Now is sung :

“ Little Star, I look on you
Whom the moon is drawing close.
Nicolete is there with you,
Darling mine all bright of hue.
I think God would have my
love
For the evening light above,
Which for her had fairer shone.
Sister sweet, were mine the choice
Straight I'd mount to you above,
Dare the falling, and rejoice
There on high to be with you !



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Ah ! but I would kiss you close !
Were I the king's very son,
You would still befit me true,
Sister, sweet friend !”



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26.

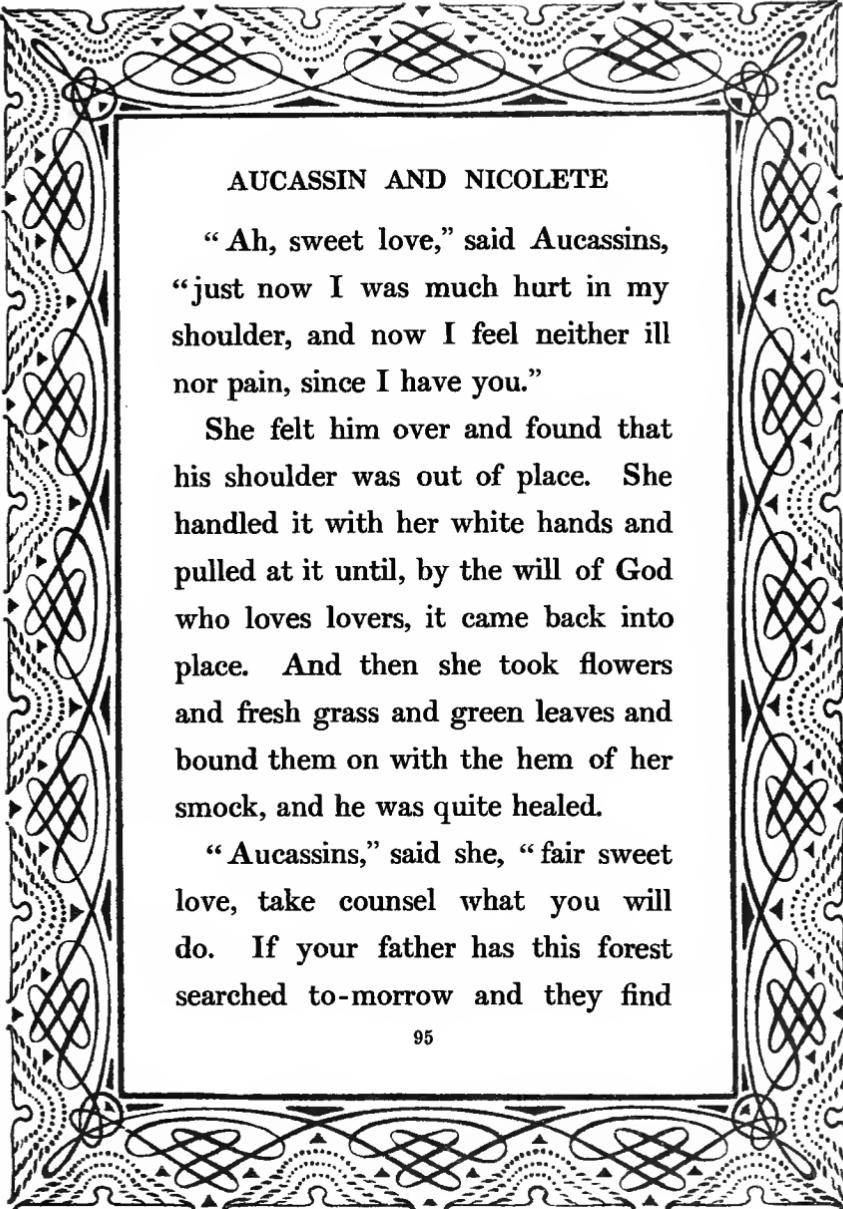
*Now they say and relate and tell
the story :*

When Nicolette heard Aucassin, she came to him, for she was not far off. She came into the harbour and threw her arms round his neck and kissed him and embraced him.

“ Fair sweet love, well found ! ”

“ And you, fair sweet love, well found ! ”

They kissed and embraced each other, and fair was their joy.

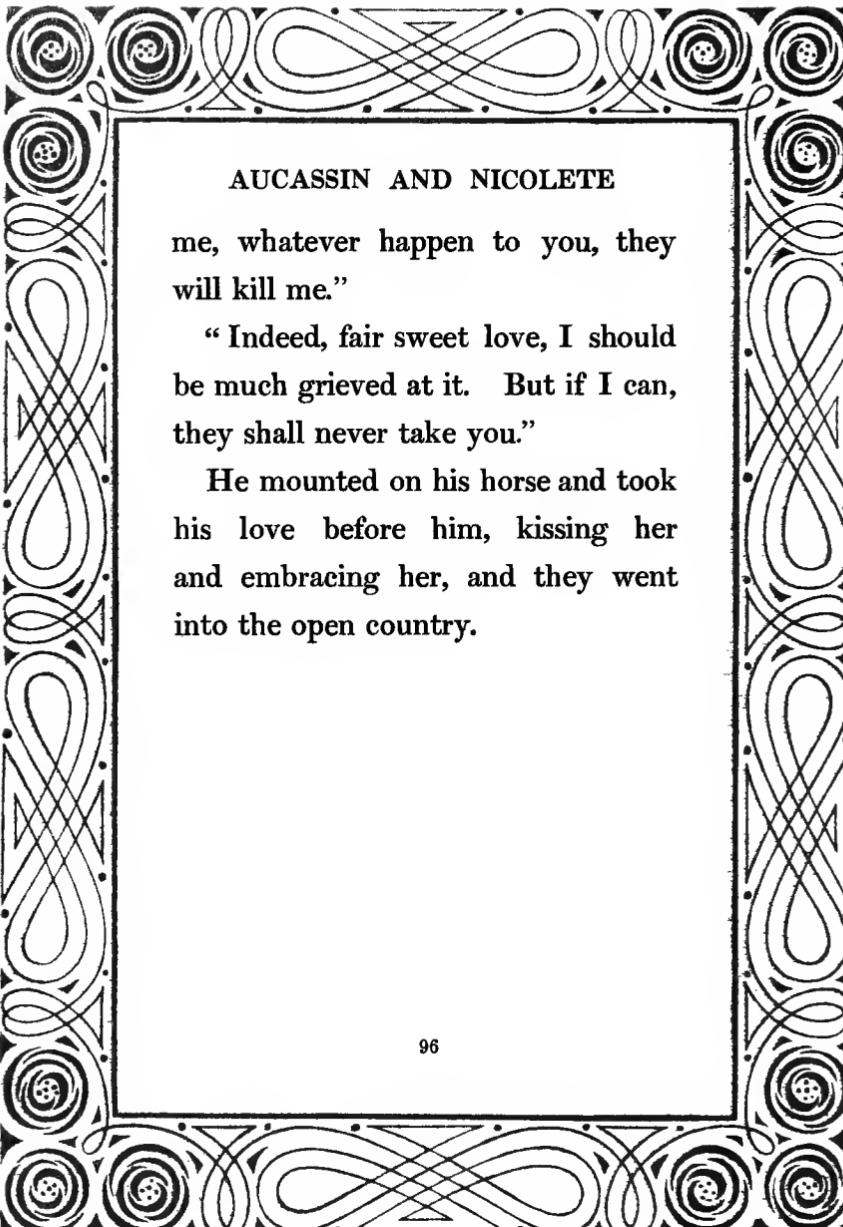


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“Ah, sweet love,” said Aucassins, “just now I was much hurt in my shoulder, and now I feel neither ill nor pain, since I have you.”

She felt him over and found that his shoulder was out of place. She handled it with her white hands and pulled at it until, by the will of God who loves lovers, it came back into place. And then she took flowers and fresh grass and green leaves and bound them on with the hem of her smock, and he was quite healed.

“Aucassins,” said she, “fair sweet love, take counsel what you will do. If your father has this forest searched to-morrow and they find

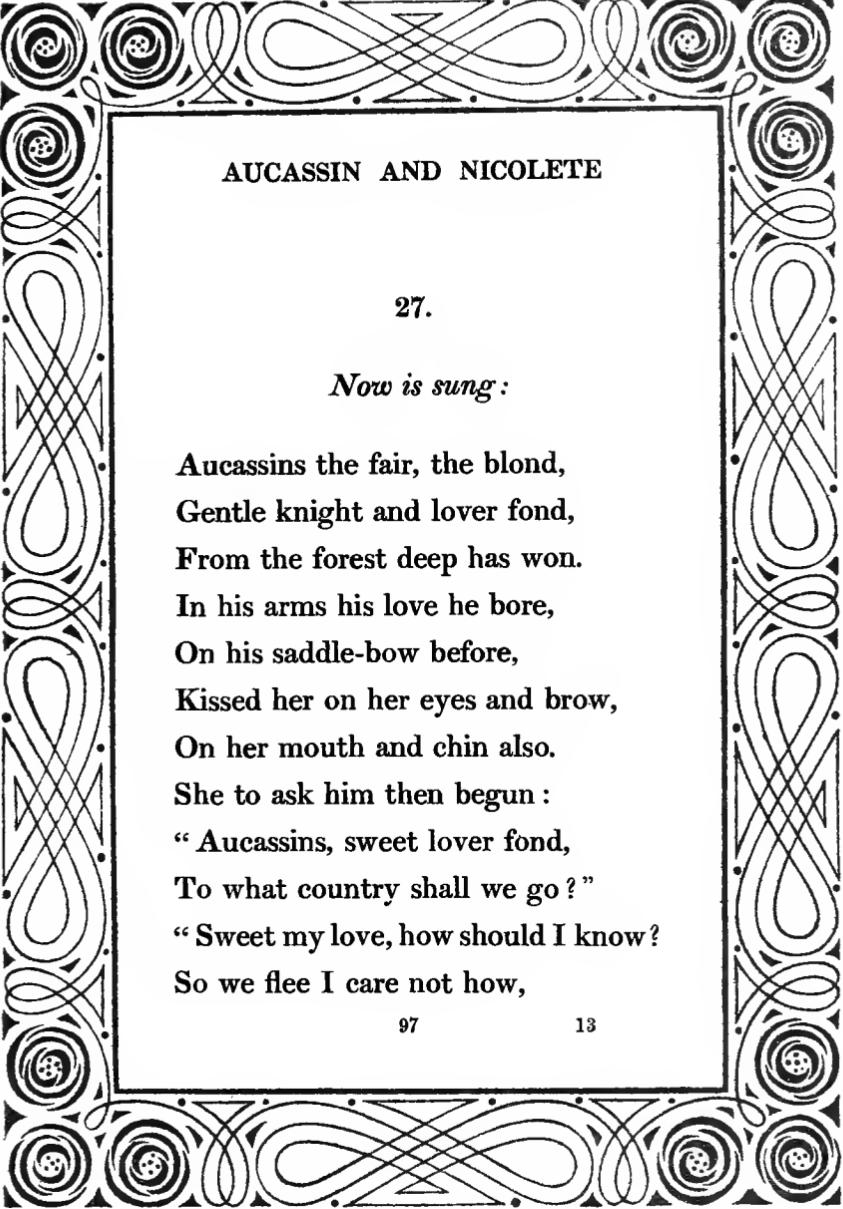


AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

me, whatever happen to you, they will kill me."

"Indeed, fair sweet love, I should be much grieved at it. But if I can, they shall never take you."

He mounted on his horse and took his love before him, kissing her and embracing her, and they went into the open country.

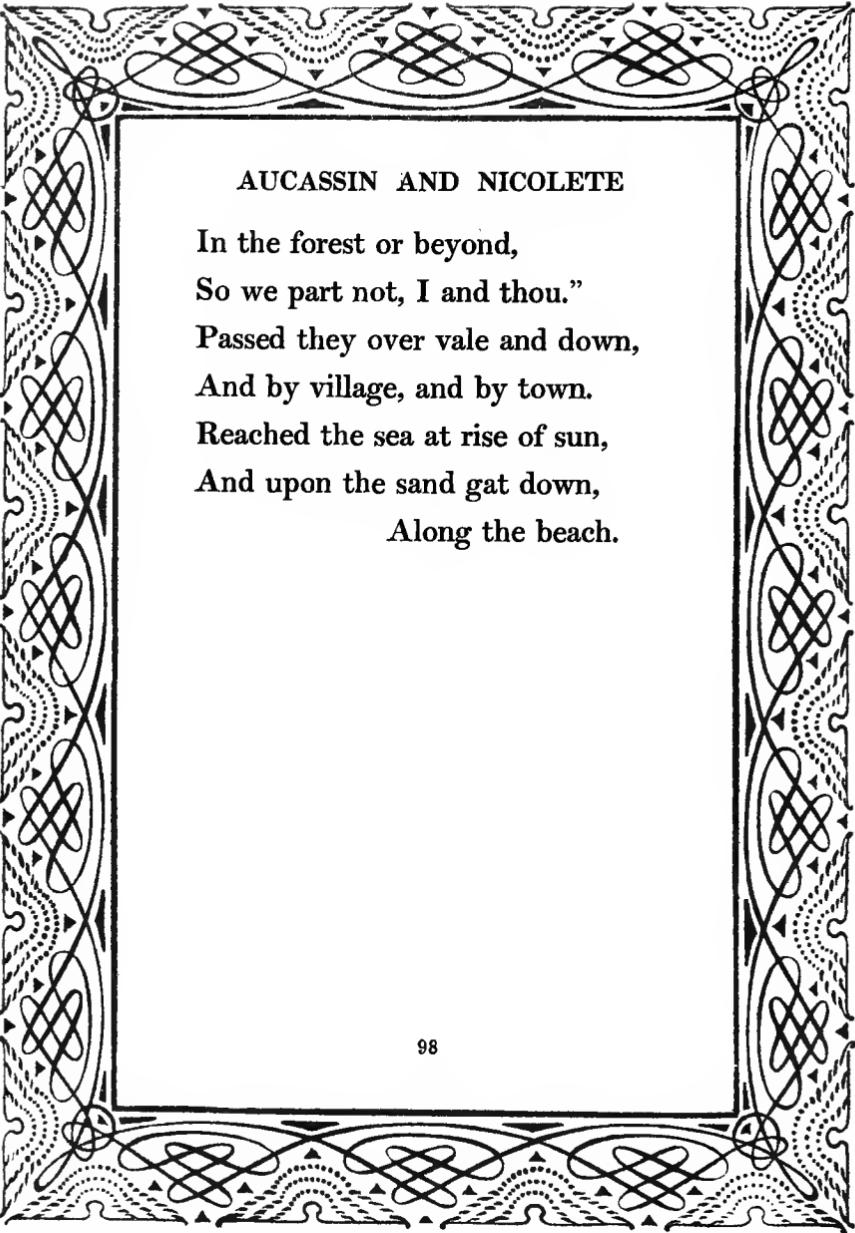


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27.

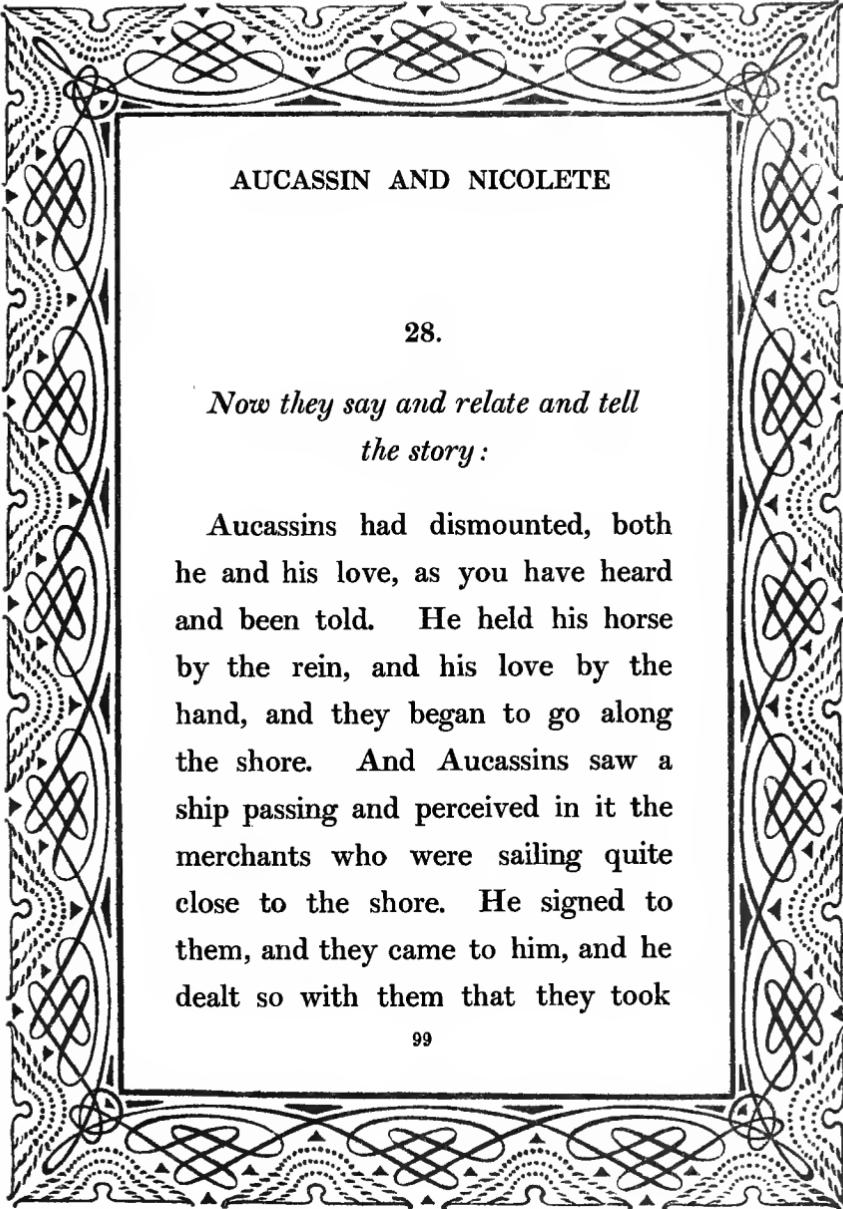
Now is sung :

Aucassins the fair, the blond,
Gentle knight and lover fond,
From the forest deep has won.
In his arms his love he bore,
On his saddle-bow before,
Kissed her on her eyes and brow,
On her mouth and chin also.
She to ask him then begun :
“ Aucassins, sweet lover fond,
To what country shall we go ? ”
“ Sweet my love, how should I know ?
So we flee I care not how,



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In the forest or beyond,
So we part not, I and thou."
Passed they over vale and down,
And by village, and by town.
Reached the sea at rise of sun,
And upon the sand gat down,
Along the beach.



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

28.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story :*

Aucassins had dismounted, both he and his love, as you have heard and been told. He held his horse by the rein, and his love by the hand, and they began to go along the shore. And Aucassins saw a ship passing and perceived in it the merchants who were sailing quite close to the shore. He signed to them, and they came to him, and he dealt so with them that they took



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them into their ship. And when they were on the high sea, a storm rose great and marvellous, which took them from land to land, until they came to a strange land and entered the port of the castle of Torelore. Then they asked what land it was, and they were told that it was the land of the King of Torelore. Then Aucassins asked what man he was, and if he had war, and they told him :

“ Yes, a great one.”

He took his leave of the merchants, and they commended him to God. He mounted on his horse with his sword girt on, and went on till he

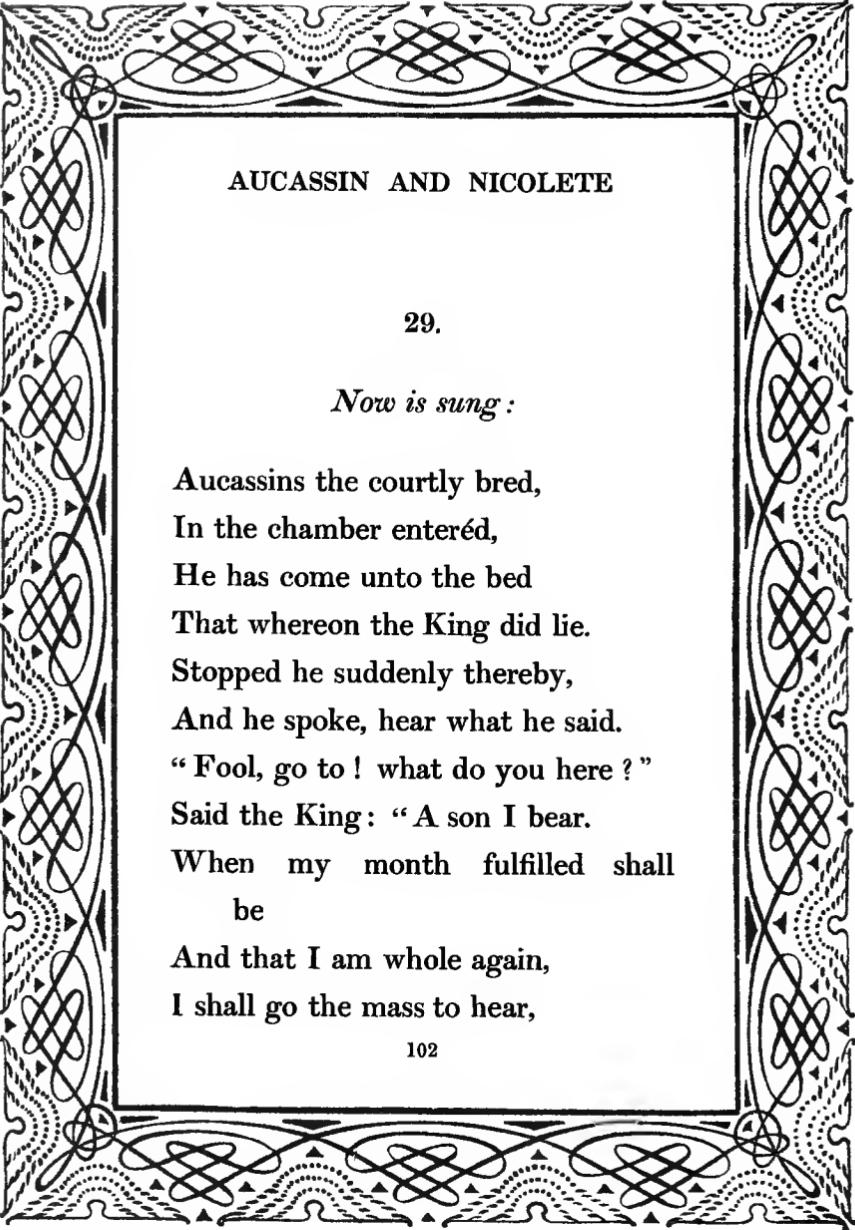


AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

came to the castle. He asked where the King was, and they told him that he lay in childbed.

“And where then is his wife?”

And they told him that she was with the army, and she had taken there all the people of the country. And Aucassins heard it, and he wondered greatly, and came to the palace and dismounted, both he and his love. And she held his horse, and he went up to the palace with his sword girt on, and went on till he came into the room where the King lay.

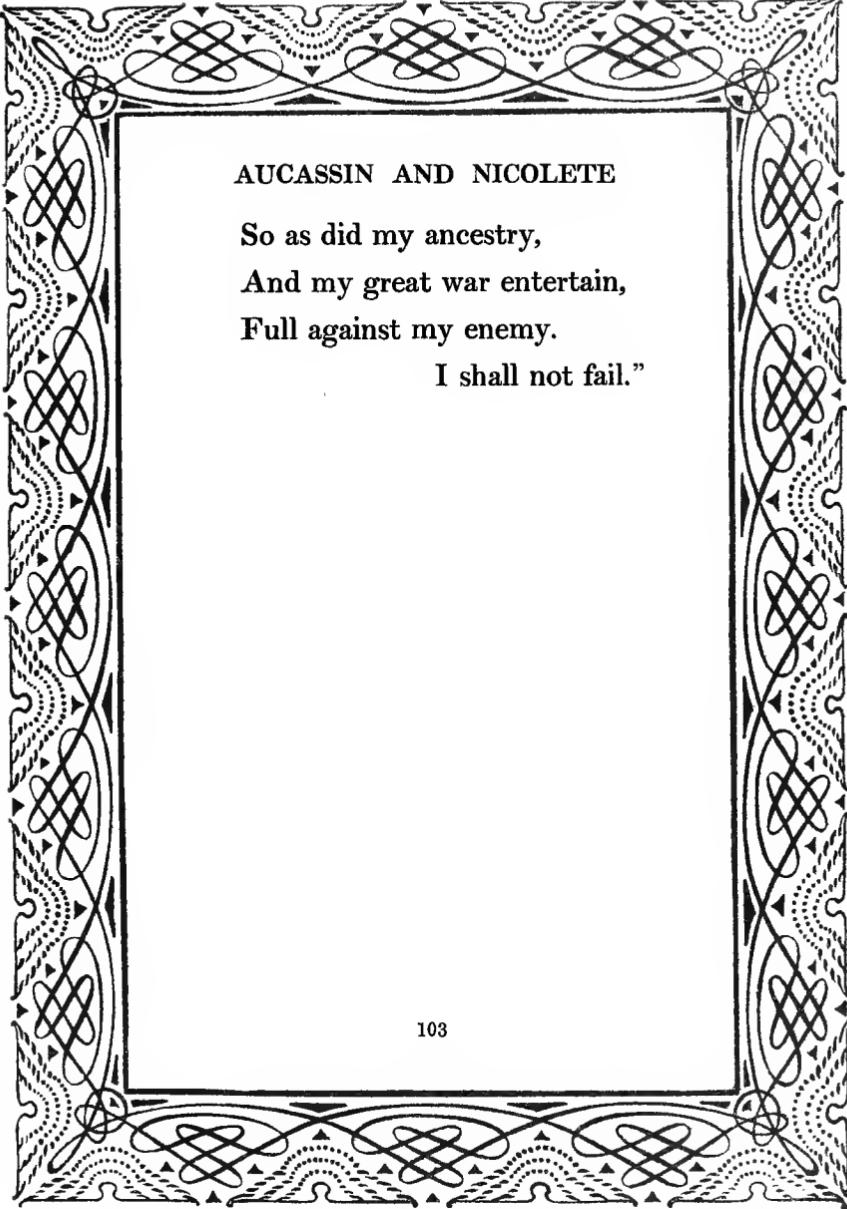


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29.

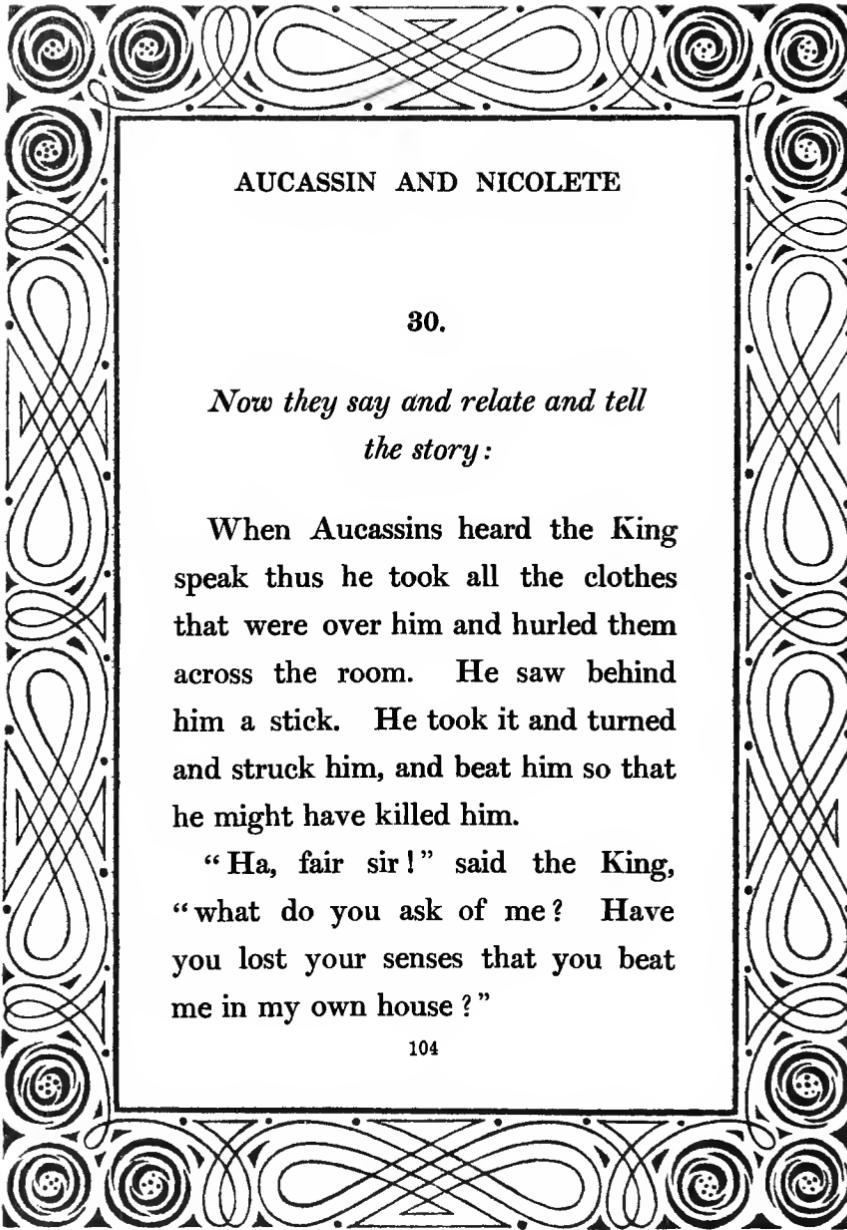
Now is sung :

Aucassins the courtly bred,
In the chamber enteréd,
He has come unto the bed
That whereon the King did lie.
Stopped he suddenly thereby,
And he spoke, hear what he said.
“ Fool, go to ! what do you here ? ”
Said the King : “ A son I bear.
When my month fulfilled shall
be
And that I am whole again,
I shall go the mass to hear,



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

So as did my ancestry,
And my great war entertain,
Full against my enemy.
I shall not fail."



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

30.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story :*

When Aucassins heard the King speak thus he took all the clothes that were over him and hurled them across the room. He saw behind him a stick. He took it and turned and struck him, and beat him so that he might have killed him.

“Ha, fair sir!” said the King, “what do you ask of me? Have you lost your senses that you beat me in my own house?”



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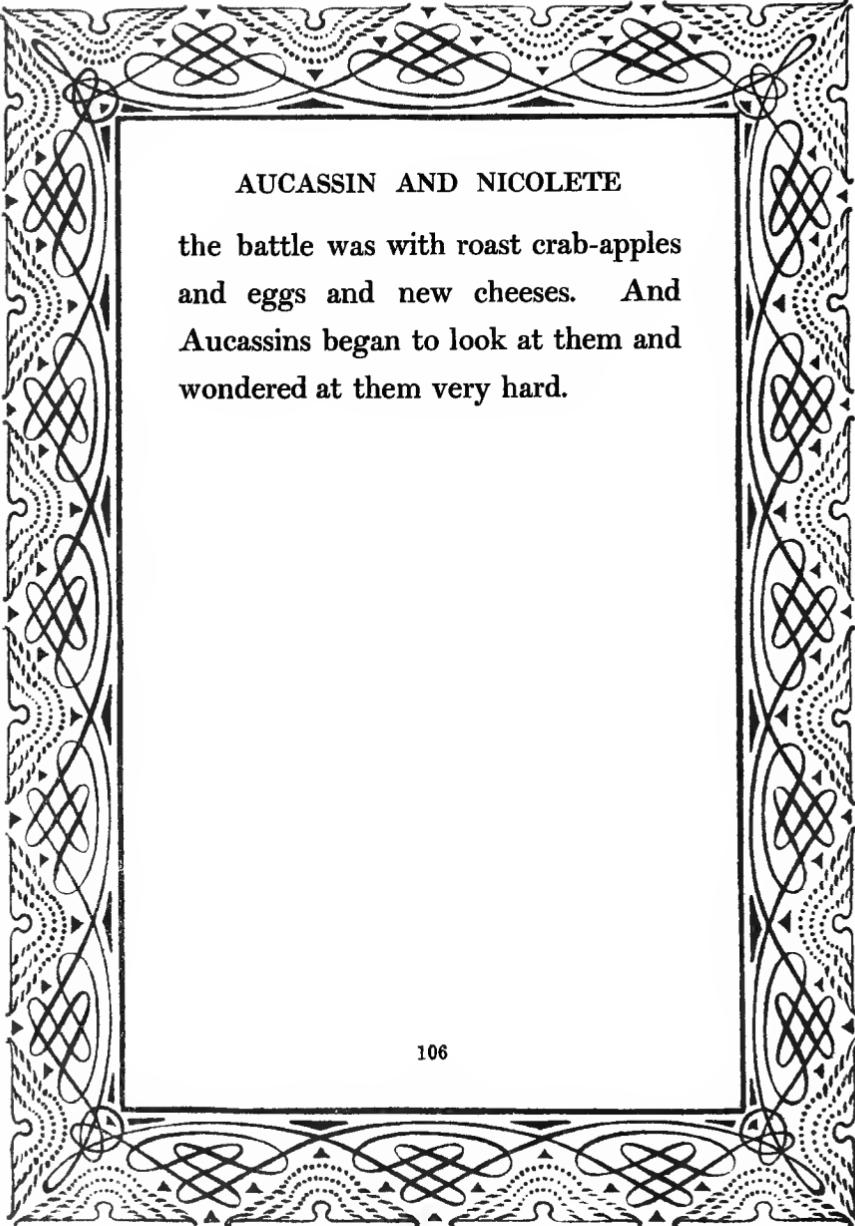
“By God’s heart !” said Aucassins, “foul whoreson, I will kill you if you do not swear to me that never again shall man in your land lie in childbed.”

He swore to him, and when he had sworn to him :

“Sir,” said Aucassins, “now take me where your wife is with the army.”

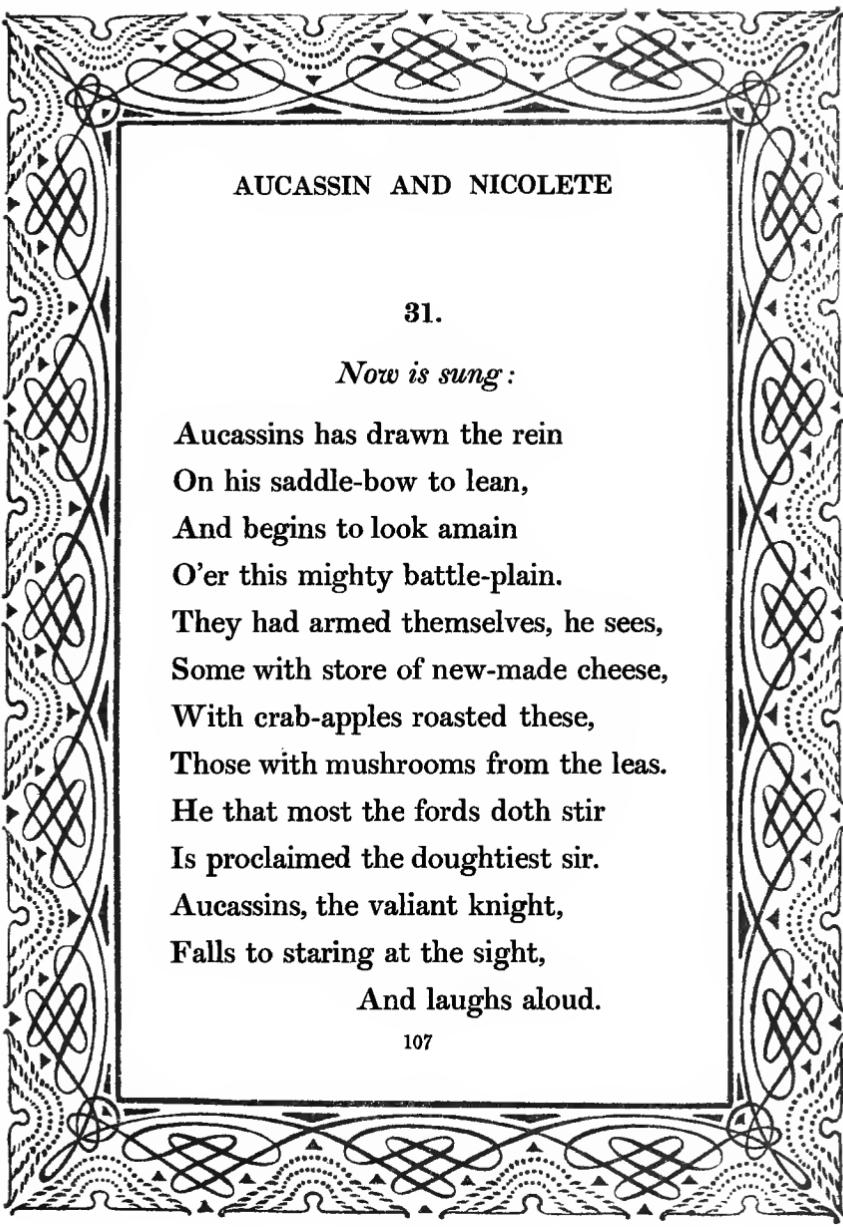
“Sir, willingly,” said the King.

He mounted on a horse, and Aucassins mounted on his, and Nicolette stayed in the Queen’s chambers. And the King and Aucassins rode till they came to where the Queen was, and found



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the battle was with roast crab-apples
and eggs and new cheeses. And
Aucassins began to look at them and
wondered at them very hard.

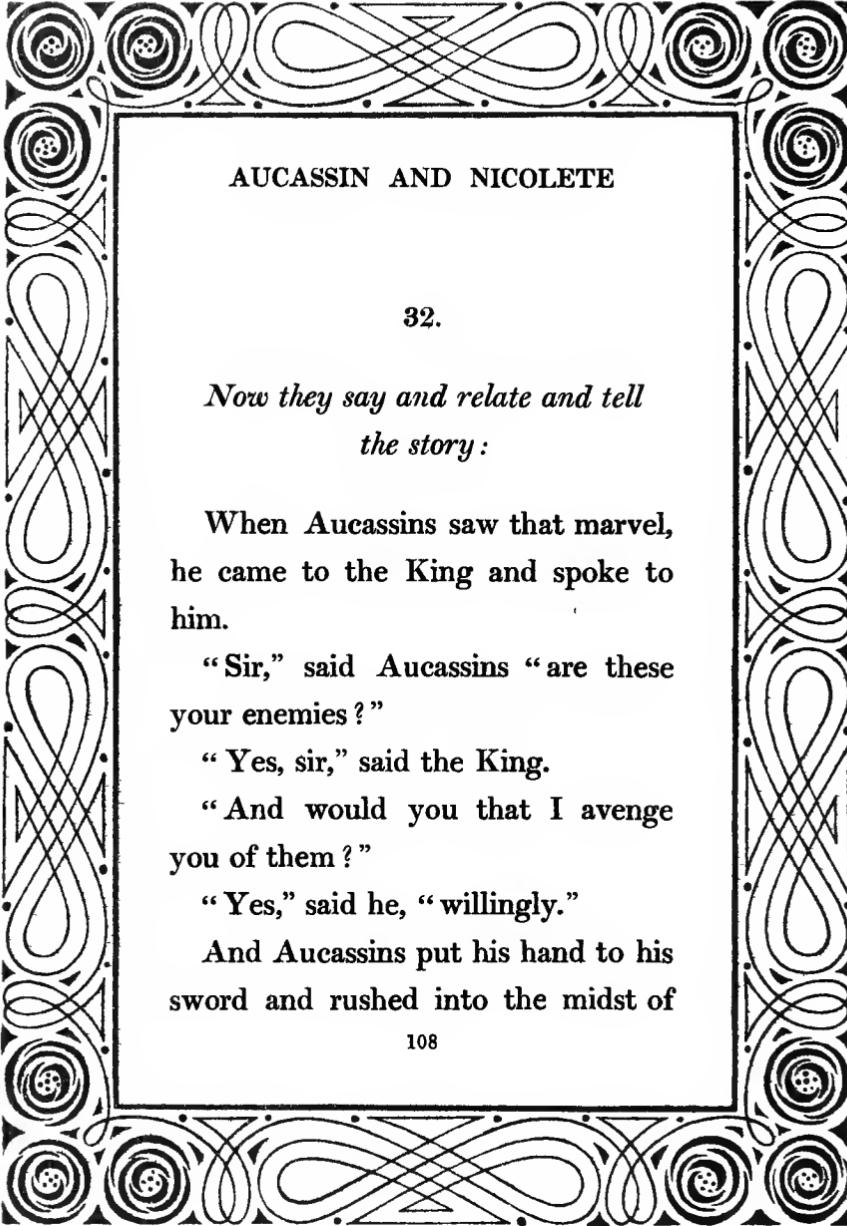


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31.

Now is sung :

Aucassins has drawn the rein
On his saddle-bow to lean,
And begins to look amain
O'er this mighty battle-plain.
They had armed themselves, he sees,
Some with store of new-made cheese,
With crab-apples roasted these,
Those with mushrooms from the leas.
He that most the fords doth stir
Is proclaimed the doughtiest sir.
Aucassins, the valiant knight,
Falls to staring at the sight,
And laughs aloud.



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32.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story :*

When Aucassins saw that marvel,
he came to the King and spoke to
him.

“Sir,” said Aucassins “are these
your enemies ?”

“Yes, sir,” said the King.

“And would you that I avenge
you of them ?”

“Yes,” said he, “willingly.”

And Aucassins put his hand to his
sword and rushed into the midst of



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

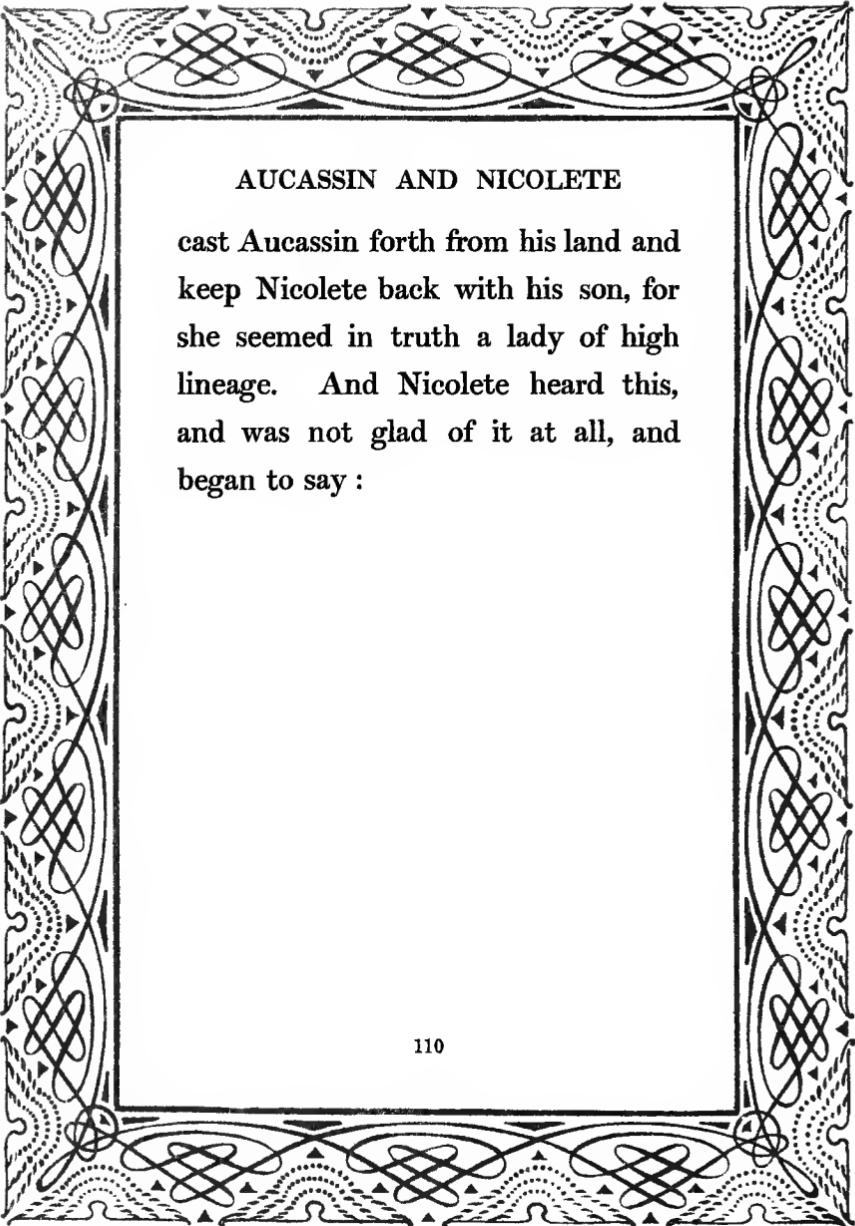
them and began to strike to right and to left and killed many of them. And when the King saw that he was killing them, he took him by the bridle and said :

“Ha, fair sir, do not kill them like that !”

“What !” said Aucassins. “Do you not wish me to avenge you of them ?”

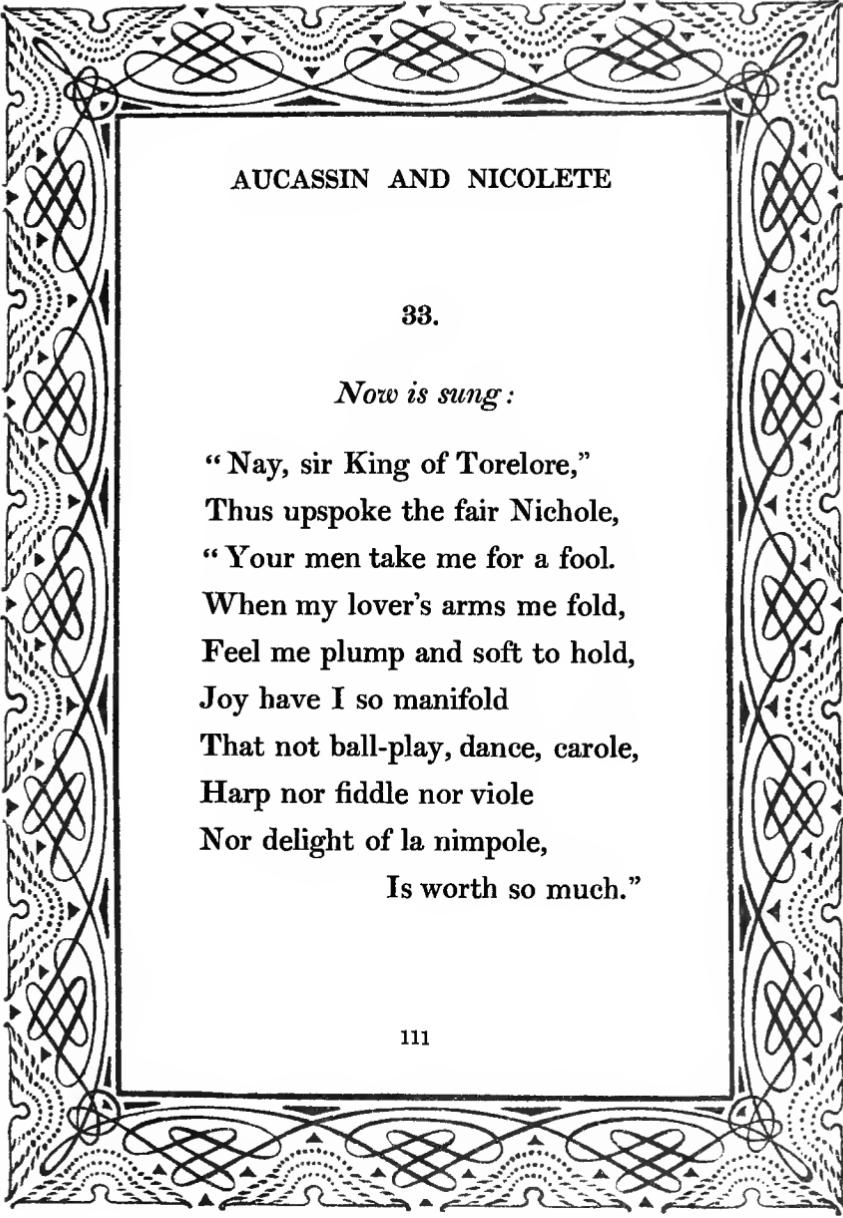
“Sir,” said the King, “you have done so too much. It is not the custom for us to kill one another.”

The enemy turned to flight. And the King and Aucassins returned to the castle of Torelore. And the people of the country bade the King



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cast Aucassin forth from his land and keep Nicolete back with his son, for she seemed in truth a lady of high lineage. And Nicolete heard this, and was not glad of it at all, and began to say :

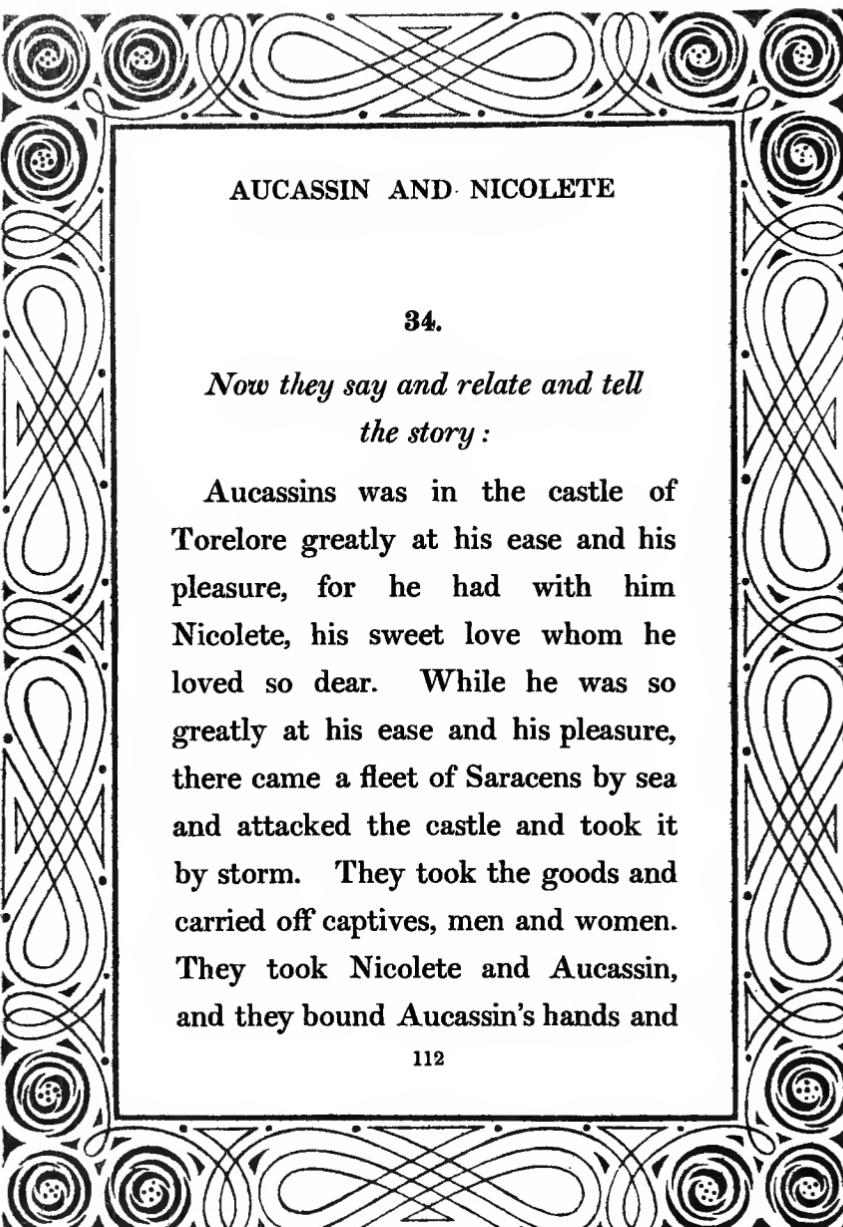


AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

33.

Now is sung :

“Nay, sir King of Torelore,”
Thus upspoke the fair Nichole,
“Your men take me for a fool.
When my lover’s arms me fold,
Feel me plump and soft to hold,
Joy have I so manifold
That not ball-play, dance, carole,
Harp nor fiddle nor viole
Nor delight of la nimpole,
Is worth so much.”



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34.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story :*

Aucassins was in the castle of Torelore greatly at his ease and his pleasure, for he had with him Nicolete, his sweet love whom he loved so dear. While he was so greatly at his ease and his pleasure, there came a fleet of Saracens by sea and attacked the castle and took it by storm. They took the goods and carried off captives, men and women. They took Nicolete and Aucassin, and they bound Aucassin's hands and

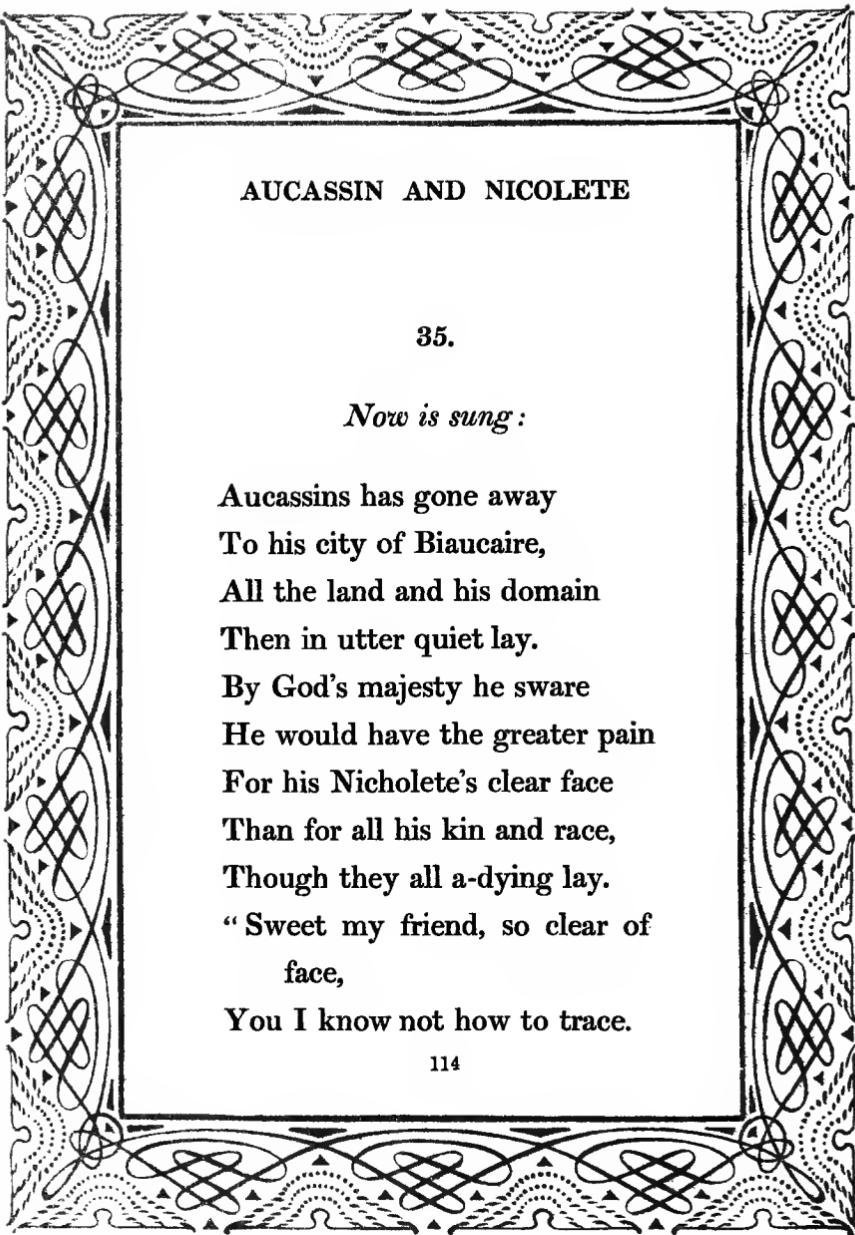
‘Aucassins was in the castle of Torelore greatly
at his ease and his pleasure, for he had with him
Nicolete, his sweet love whom he loved so dear . . .
there came a fleet of Saracens by sea and attacked
the castle and took it by storm.’





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feet and threw him into one ship and Nicolete into another. And there rose a storm at sea, which drove them apart. The ship in which Aucassins was went drifting on over the sea till it came to the castle of Biaucaire, and the people of the country ran to take the wrecking, and found Aucassin and knew him again. When they of Biaucaire saw their young lord they made great joy over him, for Aucassins had spent at the castle of Torelore quite three years, and his father and his mother were dead. They led him to the castle of Biaucaire, and all became his men, and he held his land in peace.

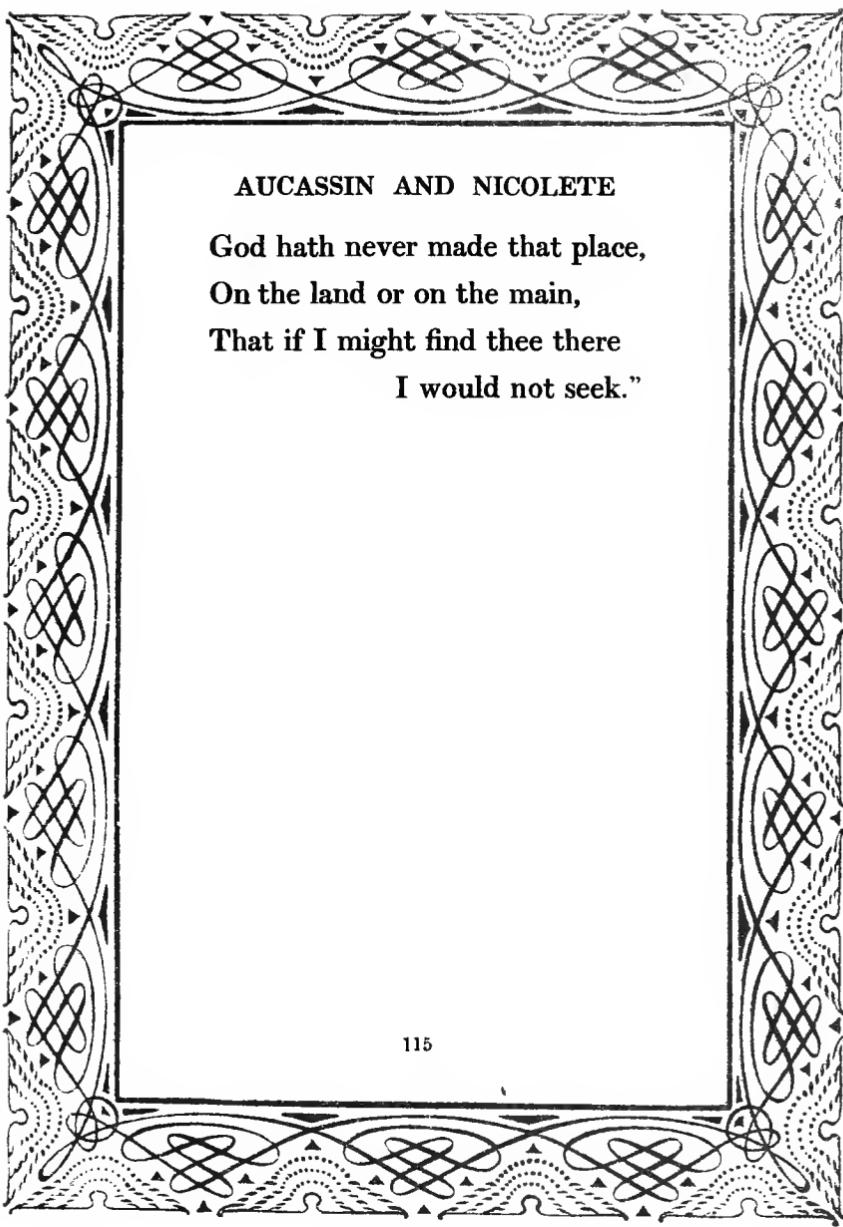


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35.

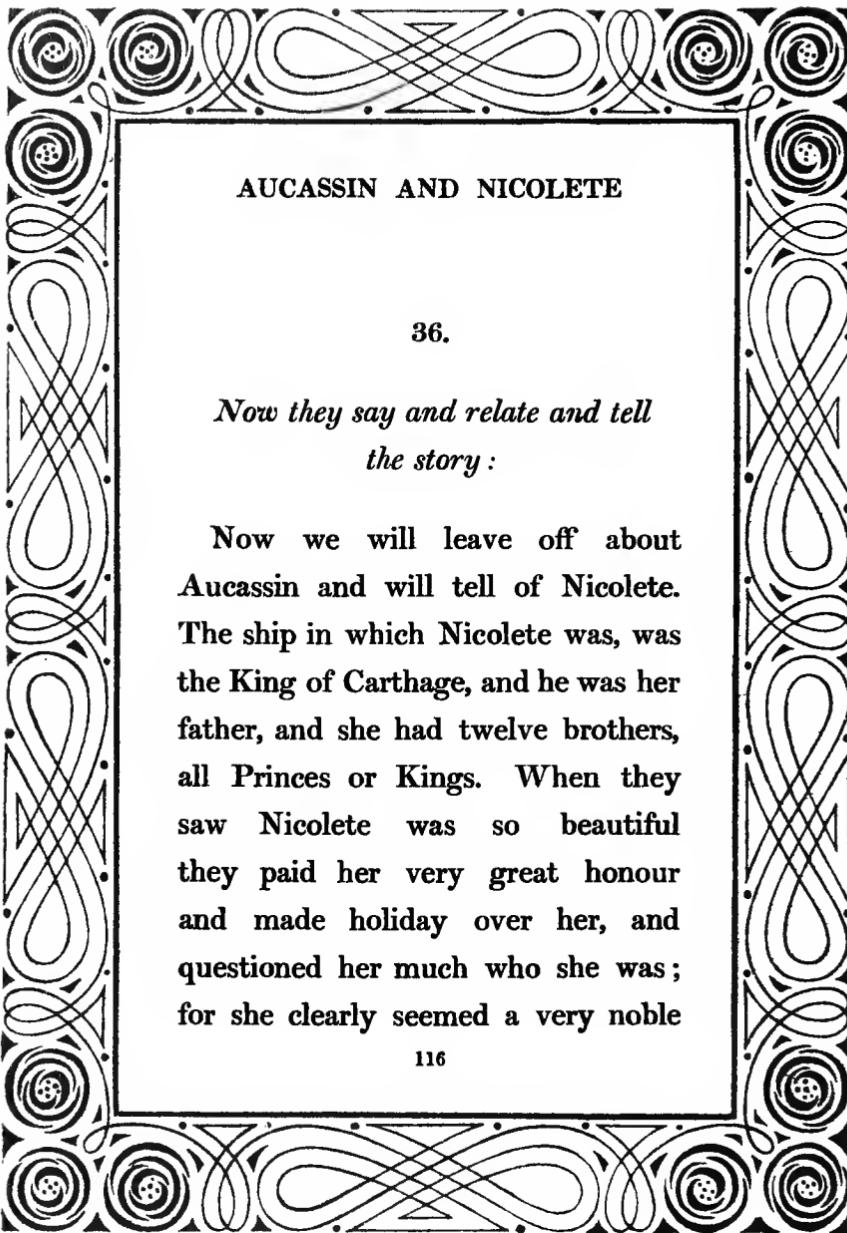
Now is sung:

Aucassins has gone away
To his city of Biaucaire,
All the land and his domain
Then in utter quiet lay.
By God's majesty he sware
He would have the greater pain
For his Nicholette's clear face
Than for all his kin and race,
Though they all a-dying lay.
"Sweet my friend, so clear of
face,
You I know not how to trace.



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

God hath never made that place,
On the land or on the main,
That if I might find thee there
I would not seek."



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

36.

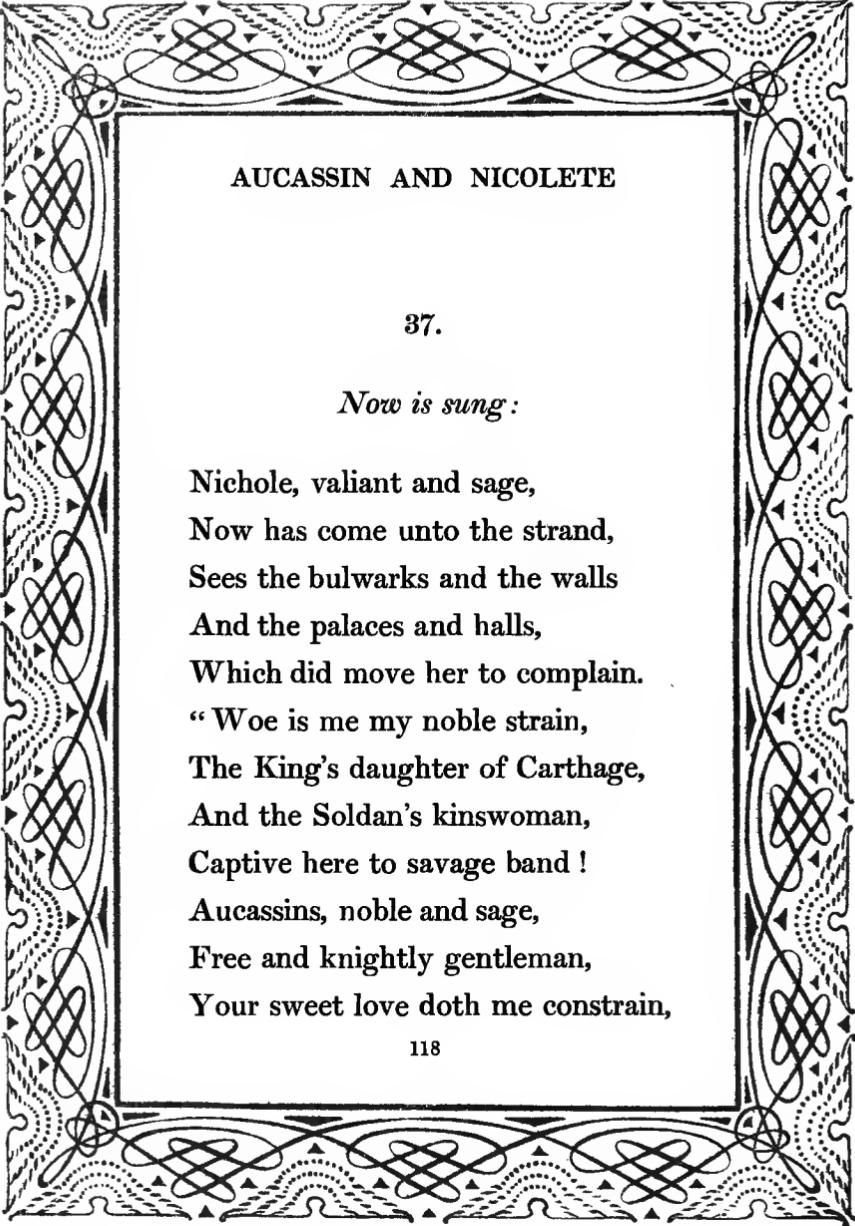
*Now they say and relate and tell
the story :*

Now we will leave off about Aucassin and will tell of Nicolete. The ship in which Nicolete was, was the King of Carthage, and he was her father, and she had twelve brothers, all Princes or Kings. When they saw Nicolete was so beautiful they paid her very great honour and made holiday over her, and questioned her much who she was ; for she clearly seemed a very noble



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woman and of high degree. But she knew not what to tell them, who she was ; for she had been captured as a little child. They rowed on till they came beneath the city of Carthage. And when Nicolete saw the walls of the castle and the country, she recognized that it was there she had been nursed and captured as a little child. But she had not been so little a child that she did not know well that she had been the daughter of the King of Carthage, and that she had been nursed in the city.

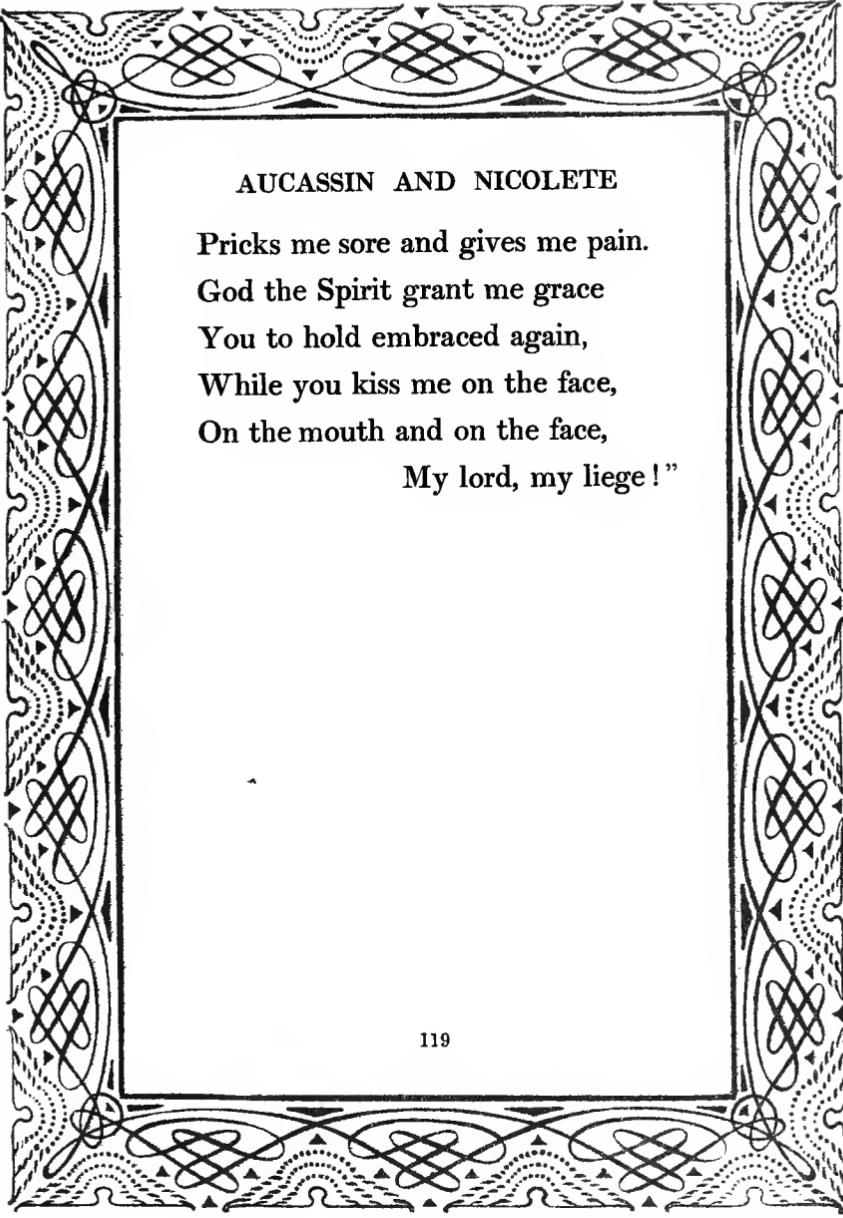


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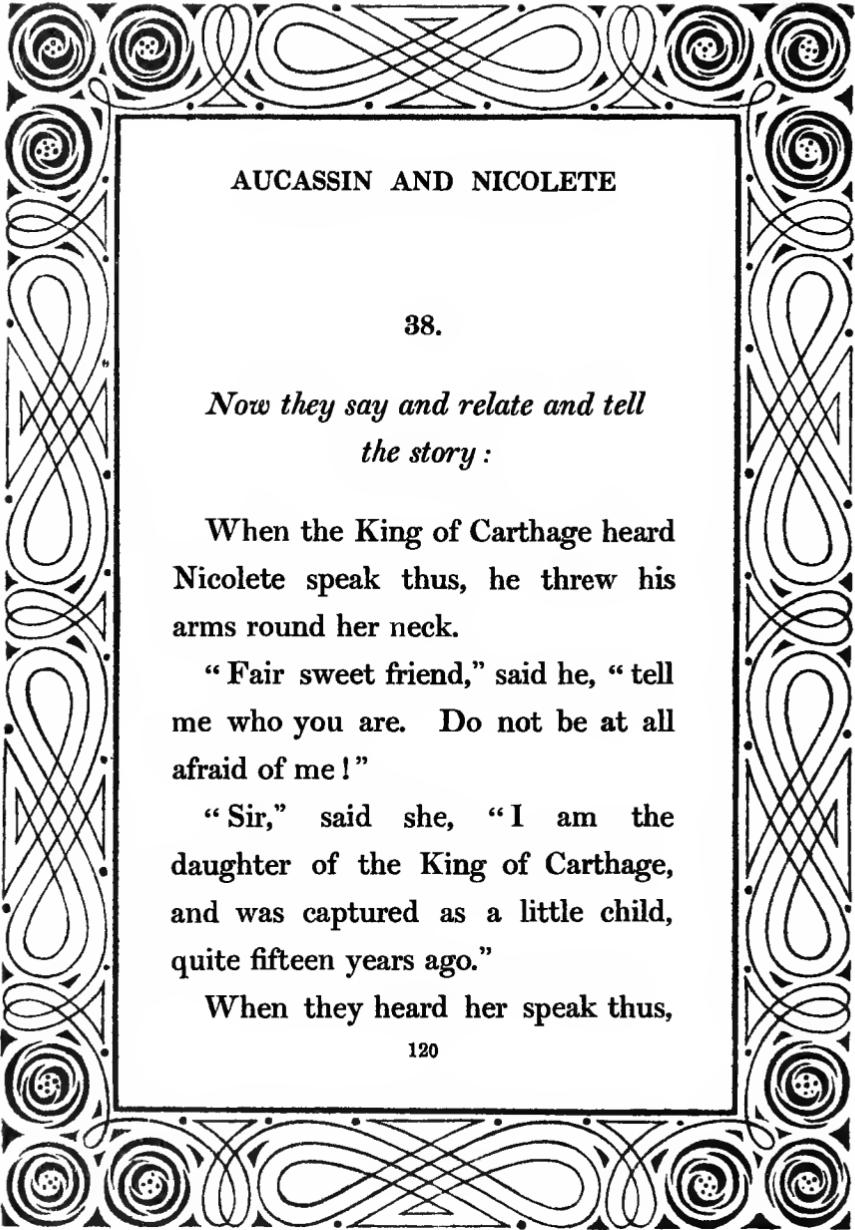
Now is sung :

Nichole, valiant and sage,
Now has come unto the strand,
Sees the bulwarks and the walls
And the palaces and halls,
Which did move her to complain.
“ Woe is me my noble strain,
The King’s daughter of Carthage,
And the Soldan’s kinswoman,
Captive here to savage band !
Aucassins, noble and sage,
Free and knightly gentleman,
Your sweet love doth me constrain,



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Pricks me sore and gives me pain.
God the Spirit grant me grace
You to hold embraced again,
While you kiss me on the face,
On the mouth and on the face,
My lord, my liege !”



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38.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story :*

When the King of Carthage heard
Nicolete speak thus, he threw his
arms round her neck.

“Fair sweet friend,” said he, “tell
me who you are. Do not be at all
afraid of me !”

“Sir,” said she, “I am the
daughter of the King of Carthage,
and was captured as a little child,
quite fifteen years ago.”

When they heard her speak thus,



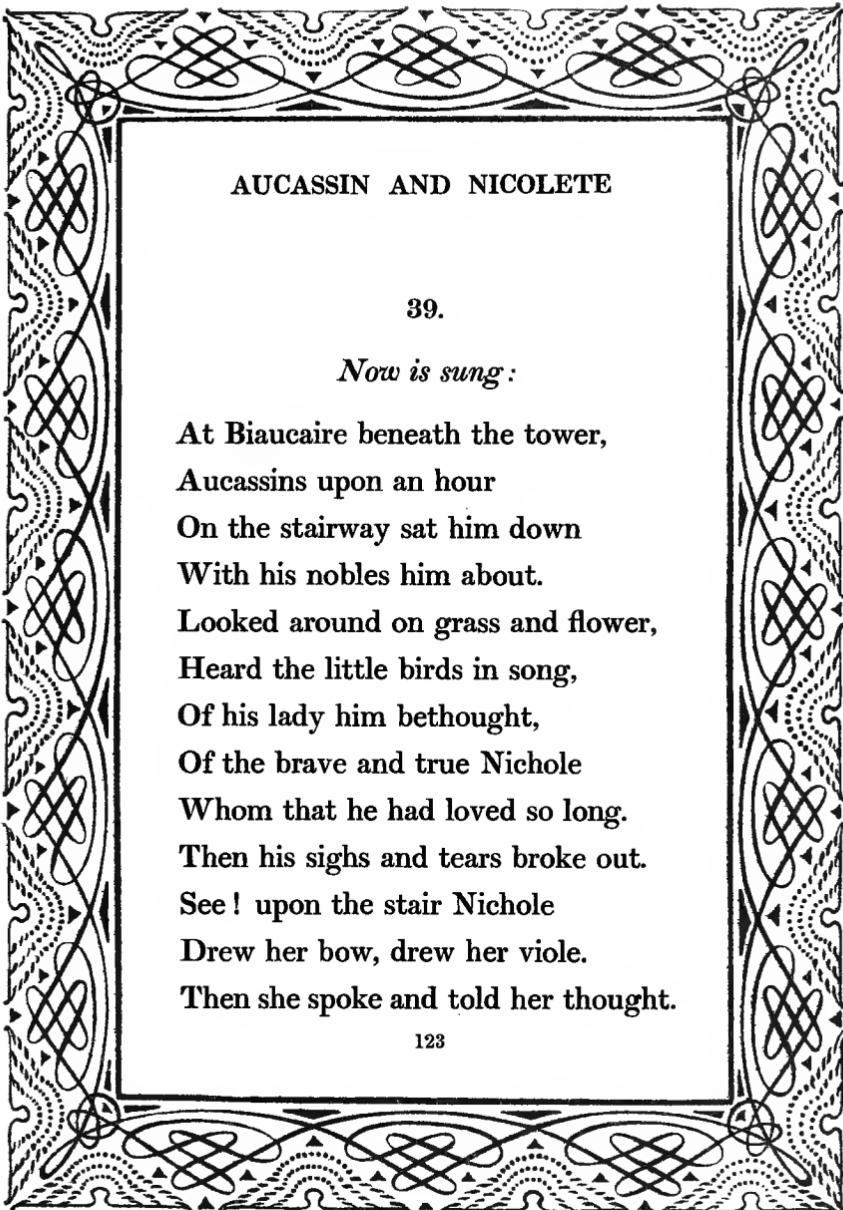
AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

they knew well that she was telling the truth, and they made very great holiday over her and took her to the palace with great honour, as a King's daughter. There she was quite three years or four, until they wished to marry her one day to a rich Paynim King, but she had no care to marry. She pondered by what means she might seek Aucassin. She sought a viol and learned to play it. And she stole away by night and came to the port of the sea and harboured in the house of a poor woman on the shore. She took a herb and with it anointed her head and her face till she was all black



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and stained. And she had a doublet and cloak and shirt and breeches made, and disguised herself as a minstrel, and took her viol and came to a mariner and dealt with him so that he took her on his ship. They set their sail and sailed on over the high sea till they arrived in the land of Provence. And Nicolete went forth and took her viol and went playing the viol over the country, till she came to the castle of Biaucaire, to where Aucassins was.

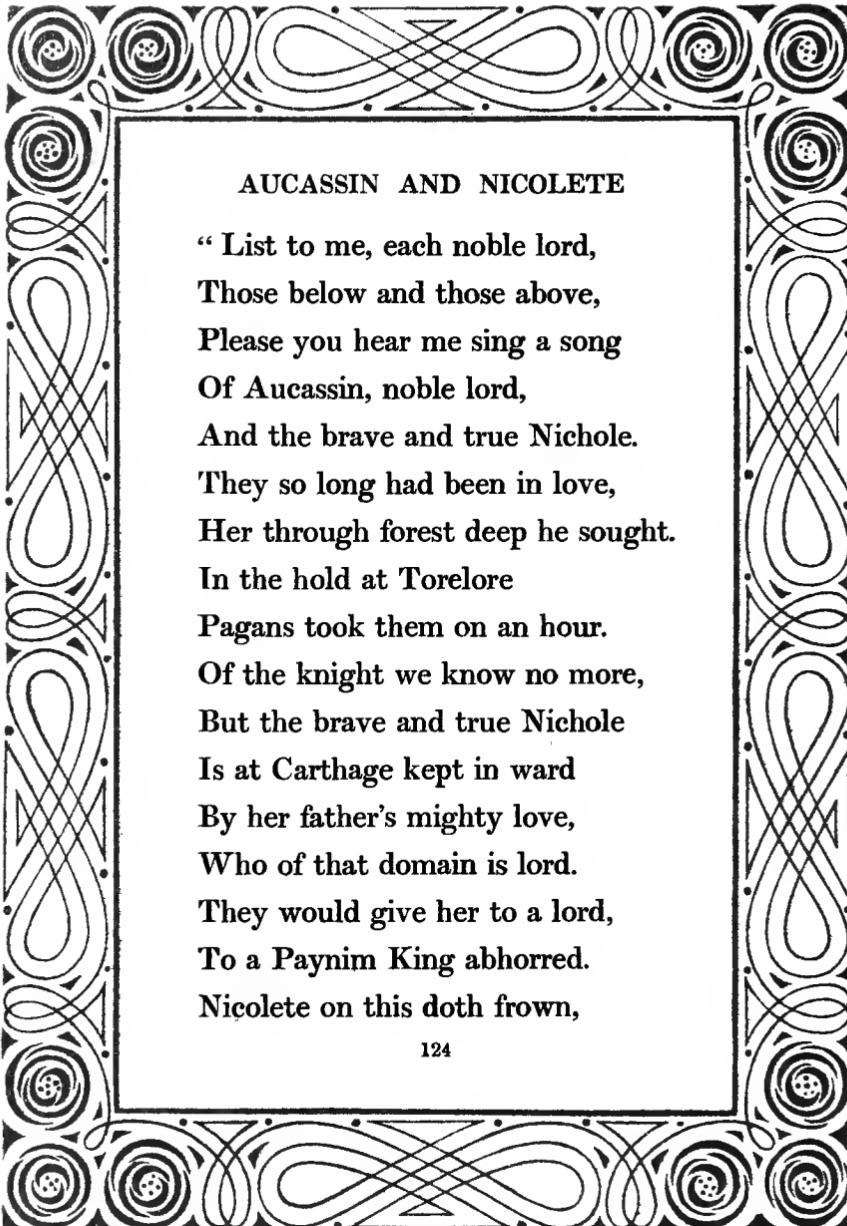


AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

39.

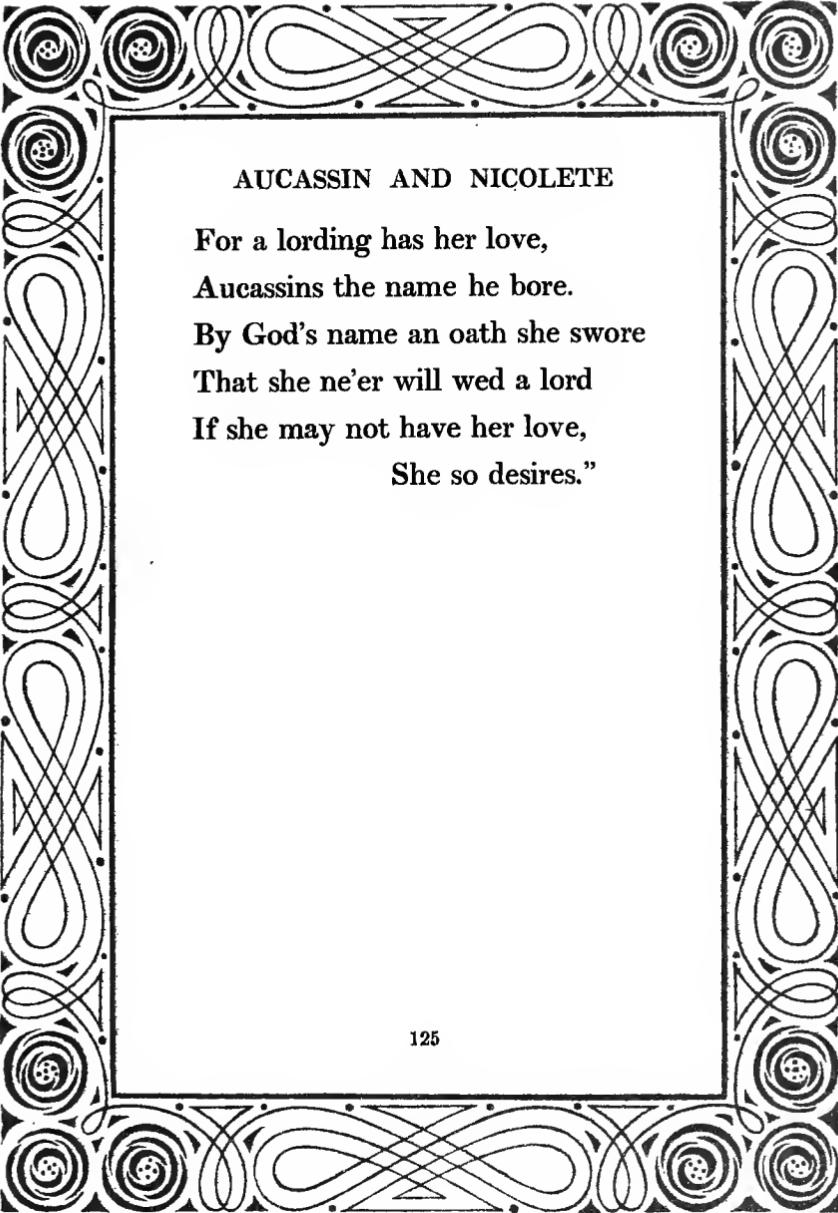
Now is sung :

At Biaucaire beneath the tower,
Aucassins upon an hour
On the stairway sat him down
With his nobles him about.
Looked around on grass and flower,
Heard the little birds in song,
Of his lady him bethought,
Of the brave and true Nichole
Whom that he had loved so long.
Then his sighs and tears broke out.
See ! upon the stair Nichole
Drew her bow, drew her viole.
Then she spoke and told her thought.



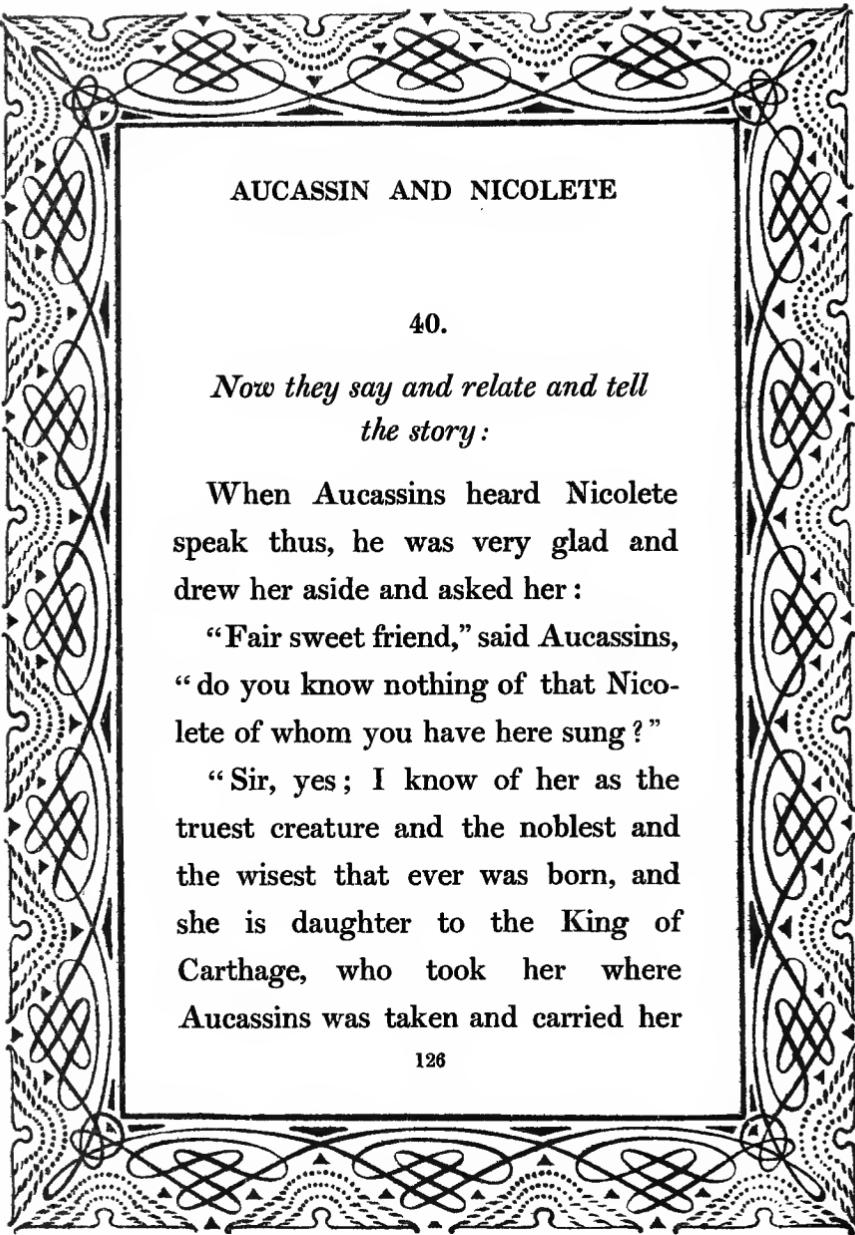
AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

“ List to me, each noble lord,
Those below and those above,
Please you hear me sing a song
Of Aucassin, noble lord,
And the brave and true Nichole.
They so long had been in love,
Her through forest deep he sought.
In the hold at Torelore
Pagans took them on an hour.
Of the knight we know no more,
But the brave and true Nichole
Is at Carthage kept in ward
By her father’s mighty love,
Who of that domain is lord.
They would give her to a lord,
To a Paynim King abhorred.
Nicolete on this doth frown,



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For a lording has her love,
Aucassins the name he bore.
By God's name an oath she swore
That she ne'er will wed a lord
If she may not have her love,
She so desires."



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

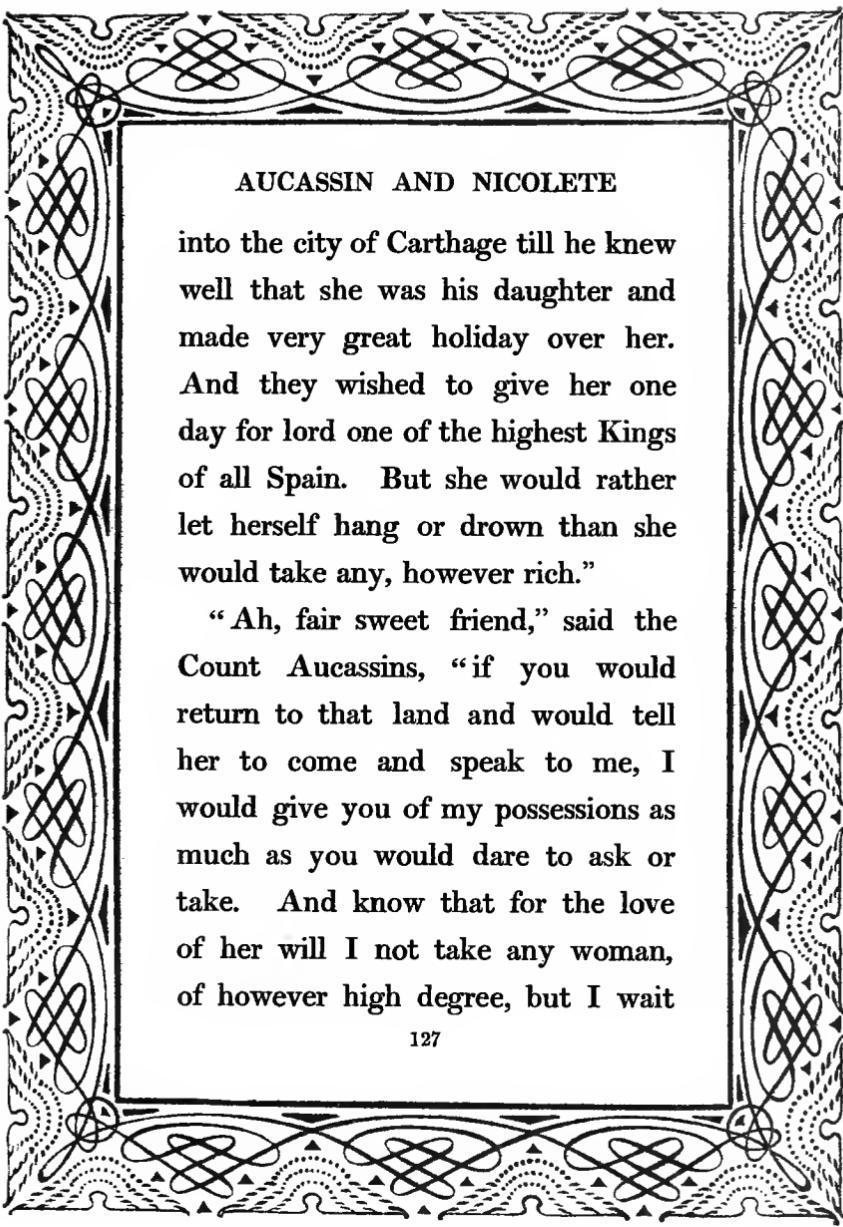
40.

*Now they say and relate and tell
the story :*

When Aucassins heard Nicolete speak thus, he was very glad and drew her aside and asked her :

“Fair sweet friend,” said Aucassins, “do you know nothing of that Nicolete of whom you have here sung ?”

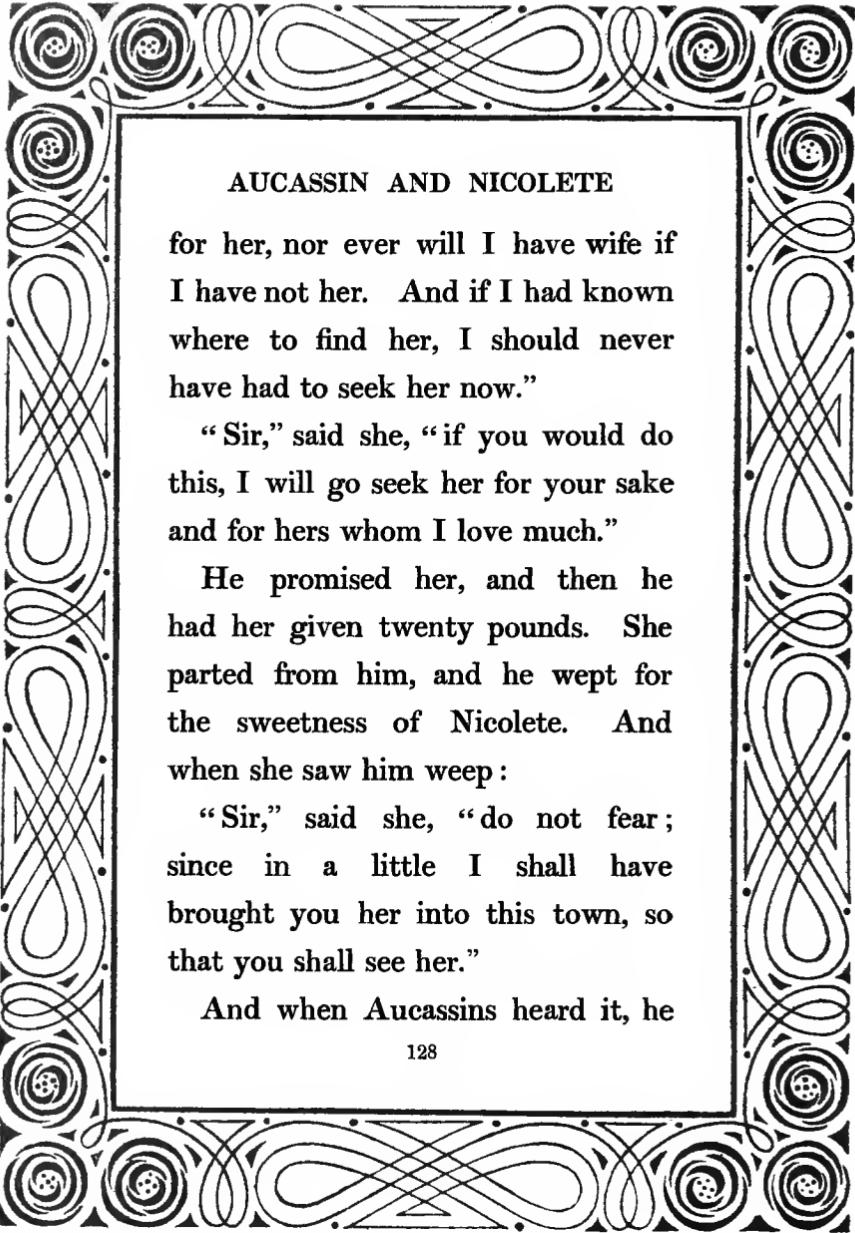
“Sir, yes ; I know of her as the truest creature and the noblest and the wisest that ever was born, and she is daughter to the King of Carthage, who took her where Aucassins was taken and carried her



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into the city of Carthage till he knew well that she was his daughter and made very great holiday over her. And they wished to give her one day for lord one of the highest Kings of all Spain. But she would rather let herself hang or drown than she would take any, however rich."

"Ah, fair sweet friend," said the Count Aucassins, "if you would return to that land and would tell her to come and speak to me, I would give you of my possessions as much as you would dare to ask or take. And know that for the love of her will I not take any woman, of however high degree, but I wait



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for her, nor ever will I have wife if I have not her. And if I had known where to find her, I should never have had to seek her now."

"Sir," said she, "if you would do this, I will go seek her for your sake and for hers whom I love much."

He promised her, and then he had her given twenty pounds. She parted from him, and he wept for the sweetness of Nicolete. And when she saw him weep :

"Sir," said she, "do not fear ; since in a little I shall have brought you her into this town, so that you shall see her."

And when Aucassins heard it, he



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was very glad of it. And she parted from him and went into the town to the house of the Viscountess ; for the Viscount her godfather was dead. She harboured there and talked to her till she revealed to her her business, and the Viscountess knew her again, and knew well that it was Nicolete and that she had brought her up, and she had her washed and bathed and made her stay there eight whole days, and she took a herb whose name was "esclaire," and anointed herself with it and she was as beautiful as she had ever been on any day. And she clothed herself in rich garments

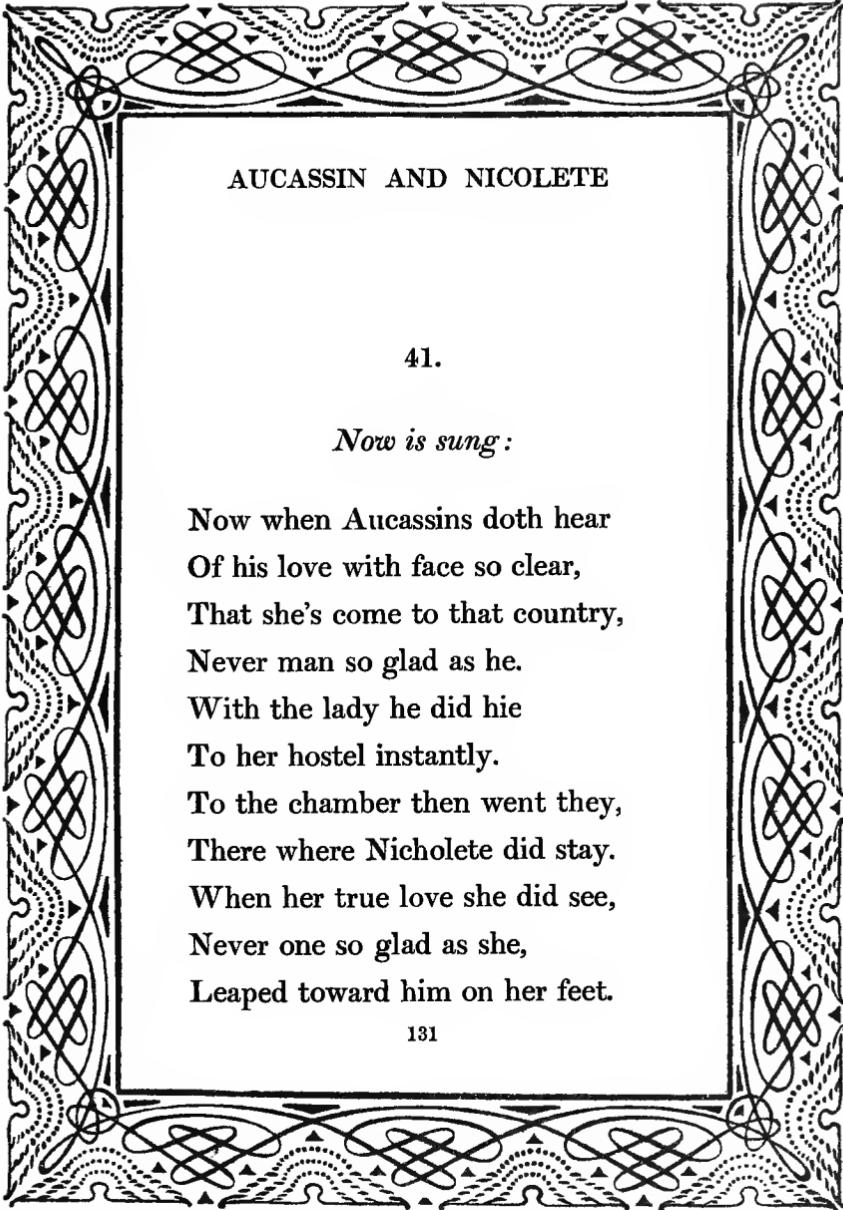


AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

of silk, of which the lady had store, and sat down in the chamber on a quilted mattress of silk cloth and called the lady and told her to go for Aucassin her love. And she did so. And when she came to the palace, she found Aucassin weeping and lamenting Nicolete his love because she delayed so long. And the lady accosted him and said :

“ Aucassins, now lament no more, but come away with me, and I will show you the thing in the world that you love most. For it is Nicolete your sweet love, who from far lands is come to seek you.”

And Aucassins was glad.

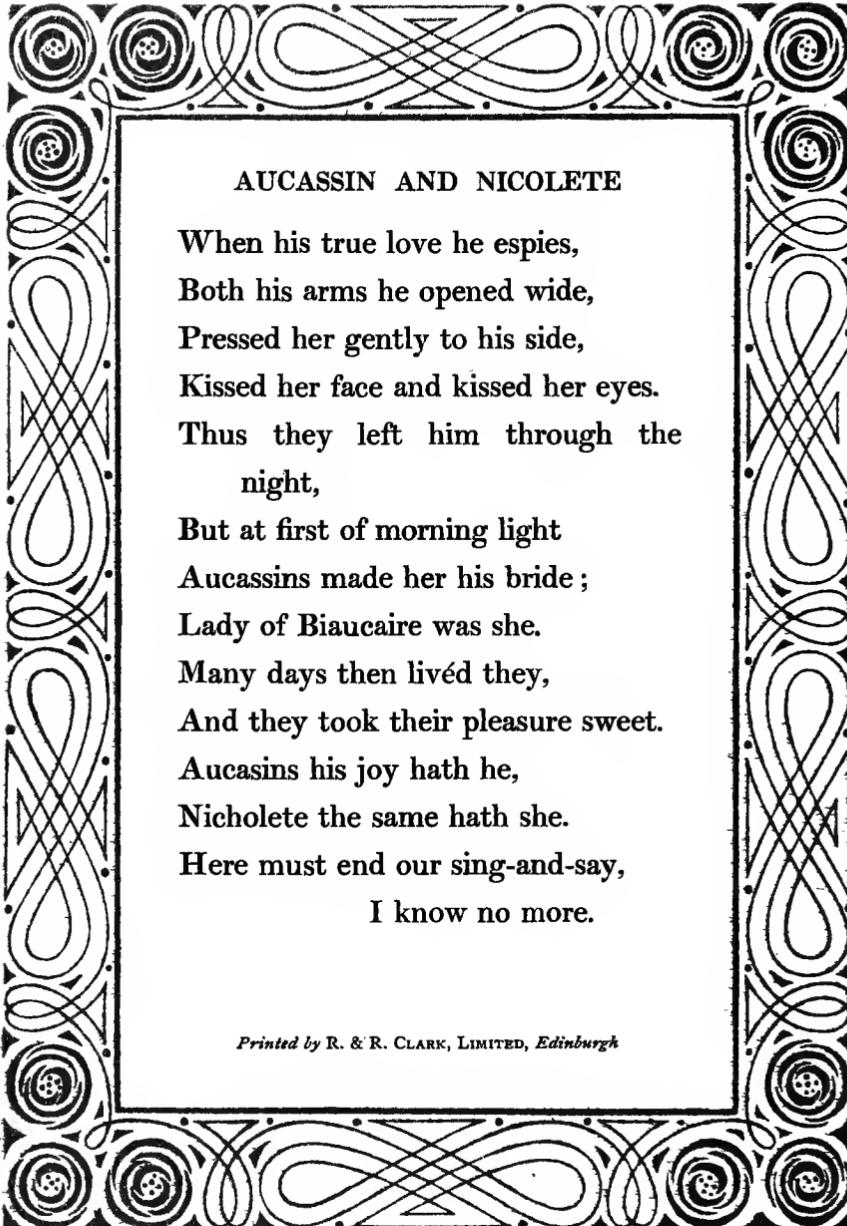


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41.

Now is sung:

Now when Aucassins doth hear
Of his love with face so clear,
That she's come to that country,
Never man so glad as he.
With the lady he did hie
To her hostel instantly.
To the chamber then went they,
There where Nicholette did stay.
When her true love she did see,
Never one so glad as she,
Leaped toward him on her feet.



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When his true love he espies,
Both his arms he opened wide,
Pressed her gently to his side,
Kissed her face and kissed her eyes.
Thus they left him through the
night,
But at first of morning light
Aucassins made her his bride ;
Lady of Biaucaire was she.
Many days then livéd they,
And they took their pleasure sweet.
Aucasins his joy hath he,
Nicholete the same hath she.
Here must end our sing-and-say,
I know no more.

